

**The Past,
the Present,
and the Future
as Seen by a
Moderate
Muslim
by
Dr. Hatim Zaghloul
(as if anybody cares!)**

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The Past, the Present, and the Future as Seen by a Moderate Muslim.
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The following book is my recollection of what has occurred in my life, and to my knowledge, information, and belief, is an accurate reproduction of those events. While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, neither the author nor IPL Media Inc. shall have any liability to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the material contained in this book.

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Introduction

I have wanted to share my thoughts about events and circumstances that I had witnessed for some time. I never wanted to write a long book. I have always been a fan of short stories. I consider my greatest asset in business, and perhaps religion, is storytelling. I have been telling a story trying to make sense of all the Islamic predictions for the End of Times for over twenty years. I had told the story to anyone who would listen. I was told repeatedly, “If this story is not true, it would make for a good book.” Maureen McCormick and *Ali Jomaa*, in particular, encouraged me to write a book. Originally, the book was going to be about the End of Times and the Rise of the Individual. When I wrote the summary of the story, I was told that individuals could not rise to challenge the authority of governments and take control of things. I wrote the rest of the book to give some background that facilitates accepting this concept. This book is mostly fiction in the sense that as a storyteller, the past is about how I have been telling it and retelling it and making it more and more interesting. However, everything in the book is what I think happened given the filtering process I described.

This is the second edition of the book. I had only printed two hundred copies of the first edition. I shared it with close friends and business associates to get some feedback. I did. It came in three packages: the only good thing about the book is the “who cares” part in it; wanting to learn more about business, Islam and the life in Egypt; and liking getting into the mind of a Muslim who loves his life in the West. I am deeply indebted to all the reviewers who provided comments. I felt that adding more about business would take away rather than add value; I shortened the business chapters.

The subject matter is difficult. I need to warn the reader that I have learnt from the Quran that it is best to fragment a story so that relevant parts are told in the right context. This had made the book rather fragmented. Please bear with me! Things make more sense by the time you finish reading the book.

As I gave a copy of the first edition to a friend from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Services, who visits me regularly in my capacity as the Chairman of the Muslim Council of Calgary, he gave me a copy of *Alchemist*, a book, first published in Brazil in 1988 and is the most popular work of author Paulo Coelho. It is a symbolic story that urges its readers to follow their dreams. I hate to paraphrase anything Paulo wrote since he did a wonderful job in his book. It was great reading. Paulo wrote in his introduction to the edition I wrote a summary of the points he tried to make: everyone had a dream we generally do not achieve them for three reasons: we are programmed and it is difficult to break away from that programming; fear of failure; and dreams are hardest to hold on to as one is closest to them. The paraphrasing is mostly in the third reason. I write this because it is a summary of what I tried to say in the chapters about myself.

I have lived a wonderful life because of the great and wonderful people I have met, learnt from and loved. It has been a great journey that all of you made very worthwhile. I cannot show my gratitude enough to everyone I know. I am endlessly grateful to *Allah*, God, for all his blessings on me, to my parents for having given me opportunities to learn that life rarely affords people; my families for the love and support they have given me; the community: Calgary, Canada, Egypt, Muslim, business, and the university for everything. I have to thank Orla Aaquist for the poem, *The Egyptian*; Jes, the fourteen-year-old Dutch Boy, for a few pictures; Brittany Touchstone for the drawing on the cover page; *Mariam Zaghoul* for the drawing for the Sinai story; Anna Tremblay from the Catholic Diocese in Calgary for valuable comments; Maureen McCormick for her edits and contributions; *Adel Zaghoul* for his edits and valuable comments; and Debbie Elicksen who acted as a ghost writer and helped make the book readable. I always like to have partners in the journey. There have been many along the years: thank you all.

Hatim Zaghoul
Calgary, Alberta
May 20, 2006

Foreword

As a white, conservative Albertan, I grew up believing that Muslim women were stupid, uneducated, and repressed. I thought Muslim men were misogynistic boors living one hundred fifty years behind the times that beat their wives and kept them in the dark, rarely letting them out of the house. I have lived most of my life with very negative stereotypes of Muslims and I must admit that I never entertained the thought of being Muslim, mostly because the only exposure to *Islam* I encountered was what was presented on TV; not exactly good PR.

After 9/11, I listened to what people were saying about Muslims and *Islam*. In my heart, I really didn't feel this was a correct assumption to make. It wasn't logical that one and a half billion people in the world felt this way, because if they did, we would have been taken over centuries ago! I purchased a few books and began reading about this faith I knew nothing about. After about three weeks, I came to the realization I had always been Muslim. Initially, this revelation confused me, because I was independent, strong willed, scientific, stubborn, and educated. My revelation was that *Islam* was the total opposite of what I had believed it to be. It was logical, scientific, egalitarian, and easy.

Islam wove its way into my heart so quickly that I declared *Shahada* (declaration of faith in *Islam*). My family was very skeptical and shocked at my choice of religion, since they too had been misinformed with so much negative press. I tried telling my family that I had simply reverted to my true nature (*Islam*). I had not "converted" to anything, and I had not changed at all. I was the same person I had always been; however, I had a new ticket for a journey that would last for the rest of my life. *Islam* was a true epiphany for me – *Islam* revealed the essential nature of mankind.

I explained to my family that "conversion" is related to doing something that is not a natural thing to do; it is a learned or adopted function. "Reversion" is when a person has recaptured and returned to their true identity or purpose in life; finding the way they were supposed

to be but, until that point in time, never been exposed to before. This is why people who adopt *Islam* as their faith are called “reverts” as opposed to “converts.”

It didn’t take long for me to realize that women in *Islam* are revered. Muslim men treated me with an incredible amount of respect and kindness. I was never treated in an inappropriate manner. I was never sexualized. I never felt repressed. In fact, I was taken seriously, and encouraged to exercise my rights as a female. I was given opportunities that I would never have been given in a non-Muslim society. I was embraced and accepted by Muslim men on a level that I had never experienced before. The men were almost like my personal cheerleaders, wanting me to succeed, encouraging me to make a difference and giving me an exceptional sense of value and worth as a woman. Muslim men were gracious in so many ways, I would need to write my own book to list everything they have done for me. I was totally blown away by how I was received by Muslim men. So much for the “misogynistic boor theory.”

The truth of the matter is, *Islam* gave rights to women fourteen hundred years ago that we still don’t have in western countries. Women are not sexualized in *Islam* since women are encouraged to dress modestly (as are the men). This concept is very liberating, since men are not focusing on a woman’s physical assets; instead, they are focusing on her heart and her actions. *Islam* gave women the right to be people as opposed to chattels; the right to a dowry (I call that our “insurance policy”), the right to vote; the right to keep her property and her assets, even in a divorce. *Islam* even assures sexual gratification within marriage. Muslim men are one hundred percent financially responsible for the family and take their responsibilities very seriously. These roles give women the ability to raise their children properly and also provide the woman with a golden parachute if something goes wrong within the marriage. Since Muslims believe that the *Quran* is perfect and has allowed for every possible situation that could ever happen, *Islam* provides a safety net for women that is not available in Western society. There are so many misconceptions about women and *Islam* that I highly recommend all western women research the facts and make their own conclusions. There is a reason why female reverts to *Islam* outnumber male reverts four to

one!

Islam is everywhere and, consequently, because it is not confined to a particular area of the world, cultural and political agendas have woven their way into the fabric of the *Islamic* faith. More often than not, what a person sees is not true *Islam*. It is very important to stress that people revert to *Islam* because of what they read in the *Quran*, not because of what they see Muslims in other countries doing. Moreover, Muslims that have the true spirit of *Islam* are a very rare breed nowadays. I am very blessed to know a few, and *Hatim* is definitely one of those Muslims.

This has not been an easy journey for me by any means, mostly because of the pressure I have put on myself. However, *Hatim* has been an extremely important part of my journey. He has always shown me the right direction to take, whether I accepted it or not. He has never judged me and has always been a positive force in my life. I have had many moments where I was ready to give up on *Islam* because it isn't always easy swimming against the current, but his silent belief in me always shone through. His strength of faith ultimately became mine. I continually receive excellent advice and *Islamic* information from *Hatim* whenever I ask, as he is never too busy to help anybody who requires assistance, regardless of their faith. He is a very special and extraordinary Muslim and a remarkable man who has been my pillar of strength on occasions too numerous to mention, and will continue to be an inspiration to me for as long as I live.

Maureen McCormick

The First Sign

The plane began its descent into Calgary from Toronto when the captain gave the usual, “we hope you enjoyed this portion of the trip” message. But then he added, “Due to circumstances that I will explain when we are on the ground, all passengers will have to deplane in Calgary and find alternate ground transportation. This flight will not carry on to Vancouver as scheduled.”

The passengers looked at each other and wondered what was happening. As soon as the plane landed safely and we were at the gate, I checked the news on my BlackBerry (a wireless device that allows you to check emails, telephone, use instant messaging, and surf the Internet) and learned New York was under attack by airplanes. I shared this information with other passengers.

My mind wandered all over the place; I almost concluded with certainty from the title of the online article that Cuba had gone crazy and was responsible for the attack. But when I checked the details of the news, I was confronted with the reality of the horrifying event.

My mom and I had spent the weekend in Florida together in a house I owned on the beach in Pensacola. We flew back together to Toronto on September 10. I left her with my brother in Toronto and I flew back to Calgary on Tuesday morning. I called her to check on her and to find out whether she heard the news. She told me she did know and then shocked me by saying, “I am amazed that finally someone gave the Americans a taste of their own medicine.”

I asked her, “What do you mean?”

She explained, “The Americans are the biggest manufacturer of weapons in the world and have either used them or sold them everywhere. Almost everyone else has suffered from their weapons, but they have not.”

I explained to her, “In the short term, the future for Muslims would get very ugly. Whether Muslims did this or not, they will be blamed for it and all of us will pay.”

My mom was pensive for a moment, thinking about the ramifications of what I had just said. She prayed *Allah* would save us all from the obvious consequences.

As I stood in the airport waiting for my bags, which seemed to take forever to come onto the baggage terminal, I called my office and discovered that people were watching the events on TV. I rushed to the office and watched the replay of the events.

“Unbelievable!” was all I could think. Mixed emotions filled my heart. Like most Muslims, I had always felt resentment towards the military might of the West and its apparent oppression of Muslims over the past few centuries. I hoped the United States government will show restraint and show the world how a leading nation will deal with pain. I knew that, contrary to this hope, the United States will react as a hurt giant and would inflict pain on a lot of innocent Muslims in retaliation. I also knew that we, the people of the world, were at the gateway to major events that would force us to be more serious; in effect, the easy life was coming to an end. Deep in my heart, I knew that Muslims probably did this and that regardless, they would be blamed for it. I knew that Muslims would go on the defensive trying to explain that *Islam* condemns terrorism. Yet, on the other hand, I believed this event would also give the Muslims a phenomenal public relations opportunity. Everyone would be asking, “What is this *Islam* that compels some of its followers to do this?” If Muslims were clever in public relations, they would focus on the first part of this question, “What is this *Islam*?”

Are We At War?

It really began in 1985. My wife and I took her son, *Mohammed*, and our forty-day old son, *Ahmed*, to *Mecca* for the pilgrimage, *Hajj*. My brother *Adel* had arranged for the *Hajj* trip and made all the reservations for us. The required paperwork went exceptionally smooth, since my immigration papers were not yet finalized and traveling before they were could have caused us problems. Fortunately, the immigration documents were received a day or two before our planned departure.

We arrived in *Mecca* in the *Ihram* garments and were very tired. We met with *Adel*, his wife *Fayza* and their youngest son *Bassem* in an apartment that *Adel* had rented; we immediately visited the mosque to circle the *Ka'aba* seven times. We then did the trip between *Safa* and *Marwa*, two small hills currently within the sacred mosque in *Mecca*, seven times. This is in honor of *Hagar*, Abraham's (*Ibrahim*) Egyptian wife who gave him his first son, Ishmael (*Ismael*). *Hagar* did these trips looking for water for her nursing infant after *Ibrahim* left her and her son there. After that, we cut pieces of our hair and took off the *Ihram*. An *Ihram* for a man is a garment made of two unstitched pieces of white cloth: one of which is used as a skirt and the other to cover one's shoulder and chest. The *Ihram* for a woman is a simple dress. The *Ihram* is the dress of pilgrims during the rituals of *Hajj*, so there is no difference between rich and poor. Everyone is in complete unison. Pilgrims spend one night on the foothills of Mount *Arafat* near *Mecca*, a night in *Muzdalafa*, and four nights in *Mena*. There are very little rituals to do in the four places. Muslims believe that they are following the rituals first performed by Prophet *Ibrahim* (*Abraham* – may the peace and blessings of God, *Allah*, be upon him).

After the *Hajj*, we went to *Medina* to visit the mosque of the Prophet *Mohammed*, where he and two of his closest companions are buried. *Medina* is, of course, much less stressful than *Mecca*. When in *Mecca*, one is always nervous he might commit an infraction whilst in *Ihram*

that would diminish from his *Hajj*: killing an animal or a harmless insect, scratching one's self, uprooting a plant, pulling hair off while in *Ihram*, or arguing. Other rituals can compensate three of these infractions; however, when it is one's first time in *Hajj*, the continuous observation of one's acts makes it all so stressful.

In *Medina*, one of our shopping trips took us to an old bookstore. Many of its books were either yellow by age or given the appearance of age by being printed on yellow paper. In either case, I bought a book written in Arabic entitled, "The Rumors in the Sign of the Hour," which was a compilation of the sayings of Prophet *Mohammed* on the signs of the Day of Judgment. Fascinated with the unknown and with knowing the future, I immediately bought this discolored book. I read it carefully. The beginning of the book was about signs that had already passed, the strongest of which was the death of Prophet *Mohammed*.

Islam is a simple religion. One becomes a Muslim by believing and stating that there is only one God and that *Mohammed* was the messenger of this one God. *Islam* means submission, and it stands for submitting one's will to that of *Allah*. *Allah* is the name of God in Arabic. There is no agreement as to the origins of the word *Allah*. Some believe it is a name. Some believe that the word *Allah* is an abbreviation of the word *Al-Ilah*, meaning The God (*Al* = The and *Ilah* = God). Muslims believe in the same God of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses; the one God who revealed the Torah to Moses after talking to him on Mount Sinai; the one God who has been living before there was any creation; the one God who created everything; the one God who is aware of everything and controls everything; the one God who forgives sins whenever He wishes to forgive; the one God who is the King of the heavens and earth; the one God who will end this world suddenly one day; the one God who will pass judgment on the Day of Judgment.

Since Prophet *Mohammed* was the last messenger from *Allah*, his death opened the door for the hour to happen unexpectedly. Signs included a fire in 1257, when a volcano erupted in *Medina*. It shot smoke and lava so high that it could be seen from Bosra in southern Syria.

One hadeeth (narration from the Prophet) in particular struck many chords with me. One has to remember there were many conflicts raging around the world in 1985. The Cold War was in full swing with the

Soviet Union. For the younger generations, the Cold War was the state of tension between Western non-communist and communist countries, namely the USSR – Russia – and the United States. Political policy was to strengthen one side against the other and the conflict stopped just short of physical warfare. The USSR flexed its muscles for the first time outside the Iron Curtain – the virtual wall that separated eastern and central European countries that were under the political and military domination of the Soviet Union, from the rest of Europe – by occupying neighboring Afghanistan to the south, raised speculation that it was looking for access to the warmer waters of the Indian Ocean. The invasion of 1982; and the Iraq-Iran war was in its fifth year.

With knowledge of this backdrop of conflicts, I read a hadeeth foretelling there will be an Eastern and a Western empire before the End of Times and that the Muslims will help bring down the Eastern Empire. It was easy to see that the Eastern Empire was the Soviet Union. How could Muslims help bring down this Eastern Empire? Well, an obvious answer was that Afghanistan was going to cause the slow but certain death of the Soviet Union. I interpreted this to mean that the *Mujahideen*, the Muslim warriors, were going to win the war and lead the Soviets out of Afghanistan, which would eventually cause the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU). The first part happened by 1989 and the second by 1991. Towards the end of the Afghan war, the SU was systematically bombarding all of Afghanistan with their (now infamous because of the Gulf wars) Scud missiles. It is said this cost the SU over \$20B for the last years of the conflict when it lost approximately sixty thousand men, who were either wounded or killed. The Red Army, the pride of the SU and its biggest cohesive force, had its first total defeat at the hands of unorganized groups of Muslim fighters. This loss predicated the collapse of the SU.

The *hadeeth* went on to predict a war between the Arabs and the Persians. One has to remember that when Prophet *Mohammed* spoke, Persia was not Muslim and that it included parts of the modern day Iraq. The listeners were told that Persia would become Muslim soon after the death of Prophet *Mohammed*. For the Arabs to fight the Persians, Muslims would fight Muslims. This caused the listeners some concern. Before the Iraq-Iran war, there were bitter rivalries between feuding Muslims

over power and control of the local and federal governments, but there was never an all-out assault with no apparent purpose.

Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran in 1979, after *Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi* conceded he had lost control of the country. Shortly after, Iranian students stormed the US embassy in Tehran and held all its personnel as hostages. The hostage ordeal led to many events, including: President Jimmy Carter was not re-elected; foreign intelligence services informed Iraq there was no Iranian military stationed within five hundred kilometers (three hundred fifty miles) from the Iraqi border. Iran had earlier captured *Shatt-Al-Arab* from Iraq in a bloodless effort, which spurred Iraq into thinking revenge. If *Saddam Hussein* had stopped at the original borders of Iraq, Iran may not have minded. However, the Iraqi army advanced deep into Iran. This was a very poor calculation by *Saddam* and his US allies. This invasion helped unify the Iranians under the leadership of the *Islamic* government. Iranians sent waves of young boys to penetrate minefields and open corridors for the revolutionary guards to attack the Iraqi army. The war see-sawed, and in 1985, it appeared Iran would prevail.

The *hadeeth* foretold that Iraq would survive this war with help from all Arabs. This happened. *Saddam Hussein* convinced the Gulf countries he was fighting the war for their survival, and they informally supported his war-efforts. Iraq did survive but was crippled with debt.

The *hadeeth* also spoke of a war between the Arabs and Iraq that would lead the Arabs to request help from the neo-Romans (interestingly, the *hadeeth* labeled a group as the neo-Romans). Their description in the various *hadeeth* was very befitting for the Americans. The Iraqi debt was a clear motivator for *Saddam* to invade Kuwait to end the Saudi control over OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) and oil prices then use Kuwaiti oil revenues to pay off his debt.

In July 1990, *Saddam* miscalculated again. If he had captured the disputed oil fields, he would have achieved his financial goals. Instead, he occupied all of Kuwait and annexed it as an Iraqi province. This caused the Saudis into thinking they might be next. The Arabs attempted to sort out the problem and considered wiping off the Iraqi debt. However, the Saudis were too nervous and quickly asked the US for help. The US amassed a large army in Saudi. This was a landmark event. It was the

first time a non-Muslim army was allowed in Saudi, whether friend or foe. The first Gulf War ensued.

The *hadeeth* foretold the collapse of the Eastern Empire would be followed by a rise in the influence of Muslims. The feud had moved from military might to a cultural divide. Initially, analysts assumed the conflict was between *Islam* and the West, but *Islam* cannot be confined to one location. While it was a new feud between *Islam* and its opponents, its basic tenets were lack of understanding from both sides. Moreover, many Muslims did not understand that their mission, their *jihad*, was about freedom of choice.

Many in the world do not understand *Islam*. The media focus on the news making groups that do not represent mainstream *Islam*. Consequently, the Cold War has been replaced by a war of cultures, mainly between Muslims and the West. Unfortunately, it threatens to become a civil war rather than a localized military confrontation.

The *hadeeth* also foretold the Arabs (now Saudi) would win their contest over Persia, but that issues would arise because of individuals turning friends into foes.

This was as much as I understood of the *hadeeth* in 1985. Mixed with the events that actually happened only confirmed my understanding. The last sentences concerning individuals were difficult for me to comprehend, and the *hadeeth* and the book became an interesting memory when I got back into life. I was busy with studies, family, community and business life. The events of September 11 forced me to look for the book and read, actually study, more about the *Islamic* prophecies for the End of Times. I was amazed to see that the various *hadeeths* of Prophet *Mohammed* could give us a clear picture for the rest of the story.

The Early Years

My first memories are of my family living in England. I was the youngest of six children. My eldest sister, *Magda*, lived with her father, my mom's ex-husband, and his family in Egypt. My father had worked hard learning foreign languages and law. In 1958, he managed to get a promotion from a secretary in the ministry of education in Cairo, Egypt, to a prestigious secretarial position in the Egyptian embassy in London, England. I was two years old when the family joined him in 1959.

I lived with my three brothers, *Adel*, *Essam*, and *Ahmed* and one sister, *Azza*, in London. There were trips to the hospital to treat repeated tonsil infections. I wanted badly to go to school with my brothers but had to wait. I remember we had a piano and *Azza* played some. There was a summer holiday in Egypt, where we went to *Abu Qair* in Alexandria. I recall packing and returning to Egypt by ship in 1963 and waiting, in vain, for my dad to join us. Eventually, he did visit for one month in 1965.

My mom was an elementary school teacher. She had taken a leave of absence to join my dad in England. However, the limit for such a leave was four years and my mom did not want to lose her job. When we first went back, she taught in the English School in Heliopolis, a modern part of Eastern Cairo. She then became a principal of a school for children with heart problems and then moved to regular schools. When I was in grade four, my mom was the principal of my school.

For a few months, my family lived in *Heliopolis* before moving to *Embaba*, a suburb of *Giza*, west of Cairo, where they had bought a house in 1956. I was born in that house. We rented it to another family whilst we were in England and rented part of another house until the tenants moved out. The part of *Embaba* we lived in was a beautiful peaceful town at the time. *Gamal Abdel Nasser*, Egypt's president from 1953 till 1970, built two well-planned model towns in *Embaba*. We lived in the newer of the two. Most people were government employees with limited

income. With my father working in Europe, we were considered the wealthiest in town. The used German Ford Taunus car we bought later on, further proved this point.

In our model town, the streets were numbered in a confusing way. The mathematician in me tried to figure out the numbering system and failed. In any case, we lived on street number eight. The houses were all two-storey houses in one of two models: three or four closed-in rooms. The rooms were small. The houses were three-level-split. The ground level had, a foyer, one or two rooms, and the kitchen. The middle level had a toilet and a bathroom. The original toilet was a *balady* (literally national) one. In Egypt we called things *balady* when they were the common ones. The *balady* toilet had no seat. It basically is a ceramic or metal base with two slightly raised footrests. I found a good picture on the web at www.cromwell-intl.com/toilet/pictures/loo-doydoy.jpg; except forget about the toilet paper. The bathroom was really a shower and a sink. We combined the toilet and the bathroom into one larger room (which I later learnt was not the best idea from an Islamic point of view); replaced the toilet with a Western one; and replaced the shower with a tub. The top level of the house had two rooms generally used as bedrooms.

The houses shared a brick wall (the width of a brick not the length) separating one house from the other. Each house had a back yard. The houses were generally in pairs with the front door of the coupled houses less than two feet apart. This made for little to no privacy. The houses were so close that we could smell the baked goodies of our neighbor and would often ask her what she was baking. After about two decades, she started sharing. The house door led into a small foyer. Four room houses had an extra room adjacent to this foyer with a window to the outside. A short hallway led to the kitchen with a room to its side. The kitchen had a door to the backyard. The backyards of all the houses on the block were fenced with a six-foot high brick fence but were all lined up beside each other. Each house had a balcony in the front; four room houses had a balcony in the back. All the houses on one side of a block had a common roof: a flat roof. We sometimes ran on the roof to bypass the street.

We practically had a zoo in our backyard. At one point we had pigeons, ducks, geese, chickens, rabbits, a sheep, a dog, a cat, frogs, a

few uninvited lizards and the occasional mouse. Not all these were pets. They, except for the dog, cat, turtle, lizards and mice, were often a delicious source of protein. The highlight of this zoo was a small monkey that our neighbor gave my brother *Essam*. They had brought it to Egypt from Sudan. Their backyard was smaller and thought we could take good care of her. She was funny. She had a thing for men. She would sit and play with one of the brothers but if an older one came in, she would quickly bite the younger one. She often stared in the mirror trying to work on her facial hair. Once in a while, she would throw the mirror down to break it. She invariably went down looking for the bigger piece. We had her when we were not around. She always managed to break loose. We learnt about it from the screams of the neighbors. Eventually, we had to give her to the zoo. It was a sad day for us.

I recall that when I first returned to Egypt I did not speak much Arabic. I used to confuse terms such as son and brother. The neighbors used to have a good time confusing me. I remember we were in the classroom on January first, 1964. The teacher asked, "What day is it today?" Everyone replied loudly, "The first." She said, "Of which month?" They all said loudly, "The first." She asked, "Of which year?" I liked this game by then and said very loud, "The first."

For some time in the 1960s, a kind of a large single cell amoeba floated around. We used to grow it in a deep plate. We soaked it in tea water. Once a week it would replicate itself. We would then give the new one to someone else. There was a rumor that drinking its tea cured many diseases. I never tasted it.

Dogs and cats are common pets in Egypt. Cats mostly live inside the house. They roam the neighborhood by night. Neutering was unheard of back then. We often heard cats' mating calls at night. Dogs are another story. Islam suggests that one should keep a dog only for protection and not to have them live inside the house. In warm Egypt, it is easy to leave the dog in the backyard. Islam teaches that to purify things of dog's saliva, one has to wash them seven times and one of them is with dry dirt. There were a lot of stray dogs in the street of *Embaba*. One learnt this whenever one came home late at night. They often traveled in packs. Our dog was special. Having grown up with a cat, he quickly learnt to climb fences. He would run up the fence like a cat and stand on the

twenty-centimeter width of the fence. He rarely spent the night out but he was well fed; unfortunately, not the same could be said about the stray dogs. Accordingly, he was a bit of a king in his world.

It was common in Egypt to waste one of the rooms on a salon: a fancy living room used only for select guests. Most guests just visited in the bedrooms or the balcony. My sister, *Magda*, used the bottom room as her bedroom until she got married. After her marriage, we turned that room, adjacent to the kitchen into a dining room. *Azza* slept with my mom in the top room. When my dad was not home, I slept in my mom's bed. *Ahmed*, *Essam*, and *Adel* shared a room. As we matured, the four boys often slept in one room. This closeness was good for many reasons. The lack of privacy prevented a lot of bad deeds and eliminated depression. I have no idea how *Adel* studied in this crowded environment. We had our share of sibling arguments but we were always together when it came to the outside world. We tried to eat together whenever we could. We almost all drank tea together around sunset in the balcony. Practically, the entire neighborhood did that. It was a great socializing time.

I recall that the Nile used to flood each year in August. This carried on till the High Dam was built south of *Aswan*. When the Nile flooded, water seeped in every field in its valley. We lived in its valley. The soccer field in front of our house used to be covered with water. This brought mosquitoes but made the land very fertile. I recall a little water in our backyard once. The Nile was about one kilometer away from our house. We rarely went to walk by its banks in those days. Mostly, we believed it was unsafe. We used to go fishing. We rarely caught a fish bigger than our children palm but that never stopped us. Unfortunately, in one of those fishing trips that I missed, a friend of ours drowned. They had decided to go swimming in the Nile and he was not a good swimmer. The Nile is very deep in places. I never checked but was told that it is seventeen meters deep. In *Embaba*, the Nile is probably at its widest since it is just south of the Nile Delta. It is probably over one kilometer wide.

There were plenty of mosques in our small town. I believe that the town was about a square that probably was one kilometer in length. There must have been at least ten mosques in that area. I used to go to

the mosque for the Friday prayer. Friday is the Muslim day off work and the only mandatory congregational prayer is the Friday noon prayer. It starts with a speech from the *Imam*, religious leader, and then he would lead the group in a prayer. This noon prayer was special in that it was only two *raqaas*, a unit of Muslim prayer; literally meaning bowing down. A unit of prayer is for a person to stand up; read the first chapter of the Quran and any other verse(s) one chooses and then to bow down with the back being horizontal and the palms resting on the knees. One then straightens up and stands still for a few moments. One then prostrates with one's face on the ground. One then sits down and then prostrates again. I often prayed other daily prayers in the mosque. Our favorite mosque in the early days was not the closest to our house. The closest one was a government run mosque; meaning it had an Imam that was paid by the government and was mostly just doing a paid job. Independent mosques had more of a religious atmosphere to them. In other mosques, the Friday Imam was a regular person who had good knowledge of Islam (and occasionally not).

We were lucky with our choice of house. The land in front of our block started as a vegetable field with corn plants everywhere. Eventually the corn disappeared and was replaced by barren land. My friends and I planned to dig a tunnel to the other side of earth on that land one day. We gave up after two days of digging. Eventually, a sports club was established on that land. It had the soccer field in front of our house. It was good entertainment.

My school classmates were mostly born in 1956, the year *Nasser* convinced the Egyptians we single-handedly defeated the British, French, and Israeli armies; we were the victory generation.

I remember when we bought our first TV in Egypt in 1963. We were the first on our block to buy one. All our neighbors used to sit on the two queen beds in my mom's bedroom to watch the Thursday night movie. I always had a strategic spot on the bed but slept long before the movie came on. I recall that, at the beginning, there were no commercials. However, to compensate the broadcasters, we had to pay a TV license once a year. There were long line-ups to pay this license. I do not remember when it was abolished, but it must have been in the mid-sixties. Commercials were introduced and the 10:00 pm Thursday movie

started at 11:00 pm because of them.

We were not as lucky with telephones. We applied for a phone line in 1965 and did not get it until 1989. Ironically, the phone was registered in my father's name. My dad had passed away in 1985. When someone wanted to call us, he would call a neighbor, a nice Coptic Christian, living about one hundred meters away. The neighbors would notify us if they were in the mood for going out. If not, they would wait until they saw us to inform us we received a call. We would go to their house and return the call if we needed to use the phone. To compensate them for their services, we often bought honey and other goods from the owner of the house. He never accepted cash for his services. This system was good for socializing but did not allow for any privacy.

In 1967, Egypt's pride was scarred by a massive loss to Israel whereby Israel captured the *Sinai* Peninsula for over a decade. What I learnt the most at the impressionable age of ten from the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel is that governments lie. Egypt had told us that we were winning the war till June 9th when *Nasser* announced our defeat. This was very important since it taught me to read between the lines. I learnt to model the truth based on the facts I know. This model had to be flexible and changeable when new facts occurred or when previous facts were falsified. This lesson was probably the most important lesson of my life. I recall sleeping under the dining table during the first two nights of the 1967 War in fear of Israeli bombardment of Cairo. We used to hear jets flying overhead and anti-aircraft artillery shooting at them, but at the time, we could not tell what caused the sounds of explosions we were hearing. An experience like this is not conducive to liking Israelis or the Americans for giving them the planes. It took me some serious re-evaluation sixteen years later to erase the negative feelings etched in my memory because of those nights.

The 1967 war caused a flood of refugees from *Gaza* and the Suez Canal cities of Port *Saied*, *Ismailia*, and Suez. *Embaba* suddenly burst at the seams with over a million refugees. It suddenly became one of the densest cities on the planet. This was achieved by randomly building additions on top and in the backyards of the houses. Some of the two-storey houses became seven-storey apartment buildings. The infrastructure collapsed. Water pressure almost vanished. Water used to

trickle from the tap. Sewers flooded into the streets. Buses were overcrowded and created the habit of not coming to a complete stop at bus stops; people hopped in and out. There was a shortage of all food supplies. Line-ups were common for everything. We had the joke, “once a guy bent down to tie his shoelace; when he got up, he noticed a line-up behind him. He was curious so he did not move. Hours passed and the line grew huge. People asked him what he was waiting for. He explained about his shoelace. When they begged him to leave, he replied, ‘but I am first in line’.”

The line-ups led to the development of a new culture where one often needed to know someone in a position of authority to get things done a bit faster. This went on from the government cooperative stores that sold all basic groceries to getting a passport made.

Adel was studying to become a mechanical engineer by 1964. I always looked up to him and, as such, wanted to follow in his footsteps. I guess I wanted to become an engineer since I was seven years old. *Magda* finished a degree in Philosophy in 1967. I had lots of fun reading some of her books when I was fourteen.

My family often had a maid to help with cleaning the house. We had a washing machine, but the water pressure was not sufficient to operate it properly. A lady came once a week to do our laundry. She washed a few loads of clothes, boiling some of them over a kerosene cooker. That same kerosene cooker would often have to heat the bath water for us. It felt like a steam bath with the cooker going inside the bathroom.

In 1968 or so, we hired the daughter of the kerosene vendor, who sold the kerosene cooker from a tank that was pulled by a donkey, to help us with the housework. She had dropped out from grade three. I was given the task of teaching her to read. She was around fourteen or so, but was the most naïve person I had ever met. My brother *Essam* was a prankster. Once, my mom asked her to water the lemon tree in the back yard. She asked *Essam* how to water the tree. He told her, “of course into the tree’s mouth.” She wondered where the mouth was. He told her, “Like the rest of us, on top.” She took a chair and tried to climb on top of the tree to give it water in its mouth. We, including her, had

lots of laughs about it.

For a month or two each summer, my family would rent an apartment in Alexandria by the sea. It was a wonderful way to spend a portion of the four-month long Egyptian summer holidays. During those summers, I learned chess, by watching my brother, *Adel*, play with his friends. In 1969, we spent every evening in an Alexandria mosque, where the preacher taught me a lot of the fundamentals of *Islam* that guided me. He taught me one of the most important lessons in religion: age is not important; it is actions that count. In Alexandria we swam; we fished; we played group games together as a family and with other families; we played chess; we played racket ball; we swam; we had long walks. It was a great relaxation.

Those young years were not easy. Things were not clear with my father. He was always talking about coming back to Egypt. He rarely sent funds to help out in the early years. We were not always as rich as people thought we were. I often had to borrow money from our neighbor, the midwife that supervised my delivery into the world, and ask her for five-pound loans around the 25th of some months. We returned them promptly. It was a hard thing to do. In all my life in Egypt until I got into university, I never really had serious pocket money. I was not deprived in any way; I always had new things but it seemed that we never had cash. My mom was very clever in stretching the limited funds she got. She also had all the kids from an early age participate in running the house: doing chores and holding the budget on a rotation basis. Holding a tight budget at the age of thirteen makes you understand the value of each penny in a hurry. This experience taught me a very important lesson in business. Whenever you ask some chief financial officer, the head finance person of a company, about how she spends the company's money, she would always answer, "I will spend as if it is my own." I always corrected her and said, "Spend as if it is your last dollar: If this was your last dollar, would you buy this item."

My mom often took one or two of us to visit my dad in the summer. In the summer of 1968, she took Essam and Azza to visit my dad. *Adel* took me and *Ahmed* with a friend of *Ahmed's* to Alexandria for some time. We stayed in the apartment of *Magda's* brother-in-law. *Magda* was married earlier that year. When my mom used to leave us boys

alone, she used to ask a neighbor, a teenaged girl, to come and cook for us. She was a wealth of information for me. She was a wonderful person who taught me over the years much about girls and how they think. Living in and out of Egypt never gave me the chance to fully understand either the Egyptian or English cultures. She bridged much of that gap for me. It is important to note the love the neighbors shared. The neighbors really helped us with everything.

Our dog was a funny dog. Our immediate neighbor swore that whenever the dog bit someone – rare but happened – the dog would run into his house. People used to complain to the police registering the complaint against our neighbor. In 1968, the dog bit a friend of mine who was being mean to him. The friend reported me. The police came and picked me up. My mom was away. I think I was in the police station for 4 hours before a neighbor came to claim me. The neighborhood was one big family with its sibling rivalries and the like. It was overall a friendly life. Our immediate neighbors had the key to our house. If no one was home, we would go to them to get the key. We only had two keys amongst the seven of us. If the neighbors were out, we would just go and visit with another neighbor and join them for dinner.

Egyptian marriages consist of three celebrations. The engagement celebration, *khotba*, is one where the couple exchange rings. Generally, the father of the girl would hold hands with the groom and read the first chapter of the *Quran*, *AlFatiha*. The larger party is the wedding party where they get Islamically married with a special Muslim preacher, *Ma'azoon*. The ceremony this preacher performs is called *Nikah*, Muslim marriage, in proper Arabic or *katb-il-kitab*, writing the book, in colloquial Egyptian. After *katb-il-kitab*, a man can go out with his wife and be alone with her in public. They are not supposed to consummate their marriage. During the engagement period, she always has to be accompanied with a brother or a sister. The third party is to announce that they plan to live together from that night on. Often the second and third parties are combined together. However, Egyptians are very specific about which party and what kind of marriage it is.

My sister *Magda* had her first son in 1969. I remember his *Sibo'a*. It is a celebration for the baby on the seventh day after a baby is born. All children from the neighborhood are invited and given treat bags.

The baby is placed on the floor and the children go around in a circle singing songs and chanting prayers wishing the baby health. An older person places a *hoan*, a kitchen utensil made of a metal bowl with a solid metal insert used to crush peppers and other hard foods beside the baby's ear and they hammer in it a few times. I never understood the value of this procedure. I theorized that it helps the baby be less jumpy. I wondered how it did not deafen babies.

Speaking of birthdays and celebrations, it is not very Islamic to celebrate one's birthday. There are often big arguments about celebrating the birthday of Prophet Mohammed. When I was young, we often celebrated his birthday in mosques with a traditional meal of dried pita bread, rice and meat on top. In any case, exact birthdays were not known in my days. This annoyed me to no end when I mastered making astrological charts. I could not make one for myself because, according to my dad, I was born on February first and according to my birth certificate, I was born on the seventh. To make things more interesting, Chinese New Year occurred between the two dates. Funnily, according to Chinese horoscope, I am either a rooster or a monkey. I do not feel like either though.

In 1970, it was *Ahmed's* and my turn to spend much of the summer in England in one of the rare occasions that I was with both parents at the same time. From 1973 onwards, I spent every summer with my dad in London. This was wonderful. It gave me the best of both worlds. My mom was strict, in a good loving way, and guided me towards studying hard during the school year. My dad was very liberal and gave me a lot of freedom during the summer holidays.

I would not be Egyptian if I did not talk about the pyramids. Egyptians take the pyramids for granted. I mean we understand that they are a wonder in construction but given that they are just there, we do not look at them with awe each time we see them. The pyramids are in on the outskirts of the city of Giza on the west side of the Nile from Cairo. When I was young we used to have family picnics by and school field trips to the pyramids. Boys used to date girls by them as well since the pyramids were landmarks nobody could miss. It was customary to ride camels, horses and donkeys by the pyramids. We did not have many theories about how the pyramids were built. We were given simple

explanations about the process in elementary school and that was it.

Traveling in and out of Egypt was not easy. Until the early seventies, one needed a visa from the government in Egypt to exit Egypt and a visa for practically every country in the world that one cared to visit. Every male, with a few exceptions, above the age of eighteen had to serve three years as a private in the military. A university graduate can be an officer for three years or, if he was amongst the top students and was chosen to be a teaching assistant, fifteen months. Students were not allowed to leave the country in the summer they graduate from high school. University students were granted summer passports to ensure they returned to the country to serve in the military.

My mom was home from work by three in the afternoon. She would then cook the next day's lunch. This was a daily routine. Back then, the work-week was six days: Saturday to Thursday. Friday was the cleaning day. Everybody in the family was assigned a room to clean. *Azza* was assigned the common areas. *Azza* took longest to finish. The brothers would finish the cleaning, which included washing the tiled floors by nine in the morning. We prayed the Friday prayer and then played a little soccer. We had lunch around half past two. There was either a soccer game or a movie to watch on TV around three.

Throughout my school life, my mom would be awake from around four in the morning to pray the morning prayer. Muslims pray five times a day: the morning prayer, *Alfajr*, is from dawn till sunrise. The noon, *Zuhr*, is from noon until midway between noon and sunset. The afternoon, *Asr*, is from midway between noon and sunset. The sunset prayer, *Maghrib*, is from sunset till the red color disappears from the sky. The night prayer, *Isha*, is from dark till dawn. In any case, my mom would pray *Alfajr* and then start preparing breakfast for all of us. She generally made fresh yogurt overnight from fresh milk that we bought the afternoon before. We often had argued over who would boil the milk so that it did not spoil. My mom would then prepare a sandwich for each of the five kids living in the house. She would then leave lunch on the stove to be warmed by the first person to come home. My mom often cooked beans overnight (fava beans). They were an essential part of every Egyptian's breakfast. I read recently that fava beans contain phenylethylamine, a substance that induces feelings of euphoria. This may explain how

Egyptians can laugh any misery off.

My mom prepared everybody a snack. The snack was mostly an egg or a cheese sandwich. Lunch was a vegetable stew with rice or bread. Because of the varying schedules, we rarely ate lunch together. We mostly ate dinner together as a family. Dinner was cheese, olives, a luncheon meat, and halva. In summer, we always had fruits with the dinner meal. One thing that I notice now is that we ate very little meat. Not every vegetable stew had meat in it. We bought the vegetables fresh daily from an open market, *sook*. We had a number of meals with no meat altogether, such as lentil dishes: soup or a soup mixed with rice. Another lentil dish mixed boiled lentils with rice and noodles. It was topped with fried onions and chickpeas. Egyptians ate this dish with lots of cayenne pepper. Friends used to compete in making it as hot as they could. Their faces would explode with sweat after each spoonful. We always had greens with our lunch. The greens included a tomato, cucumber, carrot, and onion salad plus either watercress, the greens and heads of white radishes, parsley, or chives. This was so standard that we would inquire if the green leaves were not available. We always ate green onions with the lentil soup-rice mix.

Meat was so rare in Egypt that it was only sold three days a week by government regulation. I recall that butcher shops closed for most of the week. For most of my young life, we bought our meat from the government cooperative stores. Our barber had his shop next to the cooperative and would either give us early warnings about the availability of meat or would buy it for us. This was such a blessing.

In the Quran it mentions that when the Israelites left Egypt and were in Sinai, God had blessed them with food that was either bread dipped in honey and creamy milk or fried birds. This food came from heaven to them. They got tired of it and asked Moses, “Ask your Lord to provide us what the earth gives: its onions, cucumbers, garlic, lentils and beans.” God told Moses to tell them to go back to Egypt where they will get these foods. Egypt is very blessed with those vegetables. Modern Egyptians jokingly ask, “Why did the Israelites not ask for meat, poultry and fish as well as those vegetables?”

One meal worth mentioning is salted fish (*fiseekh*). It was almost religious for Egyptians to eat salted sardines or gray mullet on Easter

Monday, *Sham El Nessim*. Even though Easter Monday is not a Muslim holiday, Egyptians flocked to outdoor gardens to eat salted fish on that day. Green onions were also part of the experience. Egyptians have been celebrating *Sham El-Nessim* (or Spring Day) for more than forty-five hundred years (since the time of the Pharaohs). It may be called *Sham El-Nessim* because the harvest season in ancient Egypt was called “Shamo.” In Arabic, *Sham* means smell and *El-Nessim* means breeze.

In ancient Egypt, Egyptians used to offer salted fish, lettuce and onion to Egyptian deities in this festivity. The same kinds of food are still eaten in Egypt on this day as a tradition, giving the day a special taste. Egyptians eat salted fish on this day. Of course, two weeks after the meal, everybody had a cold sore on their lip. My family was not as faithful in following this habit; but we did observe it many times.

We bought fruits to eat every day. We would buy them from street vendors who carried them in a basket over their heads, or on carts pulled by a donkey or a horse. Our house was often open for these vendors to come in and eat dinner in our house. We almost had standard fruits, depending on the season: oranges and bananas in winter, melons in early summer, grapes, peaches, mangoes, and plums in mid summer, and fresh dates. We had lots of hard pears. Apples did not grow much in Egypt. We had lots of crab apples. Strawberries, apricots, and cherries had short seasons. Apricot season was so short that when we meant to tell someone never, we would tell him or her “in apricot season.”

I have to tell more about dates since they are probably my favorite fruit. In Egypt, dates are plentiful and there are many different varieties. Dates also come in many colors. Unripe dates start out green; one can get a fever eating green dates. Dates then become red or yellow (different sizes). These are still hard. The red or yellow ones have more starch than sugar and taste sweet after very little chewing. However, many of them leave one thirsty. When they ripen they become very soft and the red dates turn black while the yellow dates turn dark brown. Red ones are called *Zaghloul* dates and when they are ripe they are called *Ratib*, *Rutab* (soft), or *Ramly* (sandy – do not ask me why). Yellow ones have many names depending on the size and quality. When they are ripe they are called *Tohamy*. Dates are dried either a little and are called *Ajwa* like Medjool dates or totally where they become very hard and are called

Abremy.

It is common in Egypt to buy a few complete sugar cane plants. For those who do not know what it looks like; it is more like a corn plant. We used to buy a few plants. We would remove the skin either with our teeth or with a knife. Civilized people would use the knife to cut it into small pieces. I used to just take a bud, skin it and suck the juice out of it. It was a great feeling. Also, it was much better than flossing for the teeth. Generally, it was a messy family activity. Lots of slivers would fall on the floor and make it sticky. Our neighbor had a mud wood-burning oven in her back yard. She loved the sugar cane remains because they were fluffy and sugary. She rewarded us with fresh baked pita bread.

My favorite drink when I was young was sugar cane juice. We had juice shops that sold nothing but sugar cane juice. Eventually, they became more sophisticated and started selling mango juice. Soon, other fruit and vegetable juices followed. I guess they were our version of ice-cream parlors except we had no place to sit.

Having few places to sit brings me to the greatest pass-time of Egyptian youth back then. It was to stand on the corner of streets. Only boys did that. Girls would seductively walk around generally going from the house of one girl to another's. We were not allowed to directly talk to the girls but we could talk to them directing the talk to each other. It was mostly great good fun. There was never malice or intent to hurt. Some of the remarks would be very rude and too open by Western standards. I did not stand much on street corners. When I did, I was a bit of a celebrity. I recall one time an older friend upon seeing a pregnant woman walking telling us loudly so she could hear, "Boys, that is what I was explaining to you yesterday; playing on the bed can have its consequences." She almost rolled on the floor laughing.

My mom taught me when I was young that if I missed any prayer, I would have to repeat it in hell fire on red-hot coals. She stressed that when I repeated them, I would be so conscientious that I would stand perfectly still when I made the prayers moves. I do not know if the imagery mom taught me about heaven and hell has any foundation in Islam; nevertheless, I never missed a prayer since I started praying.

Things were interesting in secondary school. I liked mathematics and physics. I learnt to study hard. My brother, *Ahmed*, taught me to

make a schedule so as to study each subject and not just the ones I favored. As I did this and studied more of biology, it made more sense and I started liking it. I began to love school.

In grade eleven, I became the high school champion in chess. It was during the final games that I learnt the whole point of playing chess. I was an average player. However, during the first game of the final series in grade eleven, I lost the queen early in the game. I had to slow down to improve my game. I started thinking longer for each move and thinking of all possible logical moves by my opponent as well as further moves based on those moves and so on. Eventually, I figured out one had to think about more moves than his opponent to beat him. I did that in the subsequent games and easily won them all. There is nothing like being champion to help one's confidence. I have lost very few games since then. I have learnt to play clumsily in the first game with a new player so that I do not waste time on thinking if the opponent is not good. I would then adjust the number of moves ahead that I think to the opponent's level. I almost always win the second game. I like to think that I was a good chess player. I am not sure though since I never played in those days against anyone ranked internationally. Also, my strategy of playing clumsily in the first game may have totally disrupted the thinking of my opponents. I know that I rarely lost regularly to anyone I know except to a friend of *Ahmed's*. Just to finish my chess record: a friend of my sister *Azza* was the Cairo University champion. I played her many times when I was in grade eleven. She was very condescending after I lost the first game but was very complimentary when I beat her in every game after that.

I was in an interesting class where they divided the top students into two groups. One was placed with the Muslims and the other with the Christians. Given that religious studies were a required course in Egypt, it was easier to have the Christians in one class. My being placed with the Christians, the son of *Hassan Al-Ghazali*, and the nephew of *Syed Qutb* – a prominent leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, *Al Ikhwan Il Muslimeen*, – gave me a unique position for learning about Christianity and *Islam*. I edited the school newspaper and wrote in the religious section.

Speaking of classrooms, they were crowded in Egypt. In elementary

school – grades one to six – we must have had around forty-eight students per class. In preparatory school – grades seven to nine – we had around fifty-four students per class. In high school – grades ten to twelve – we had around sixty-four students per class. It was not always easy for the teacher to maintain discipline. In elementary and preparatory schools, teachers carried a stick with them most of the time and were allowed to spank students to keep them in line. Our grade five History teacher used a different technique to keep us quiet. She used to reward us with telling us Sinbad stories from Arabian Nights. We used to sit on benches. There were two students per bench except in high school where we had three students to each bench.

During my high school years, I was so much into soccer that I would dream about it. For a while, I dreamt of the scores and the results of two or three highly anticipated games. One of these results was highly unexpected in Egyptian soccer; it was something like a 7-3 score. These dreams became the topic of conversation in the class for a few weeks. It ended when I was asked about the result of a game between the two most popular Egyptian teams: *Ahly* and *Zamalek*. Games between these teams had been very tense for years and once, *Ahly* fans rioted after a game. I dreamt there were twelve minutes or so left in the game and the score was tied at 0-0. I did not understand this until we went to watch the game in the Cairo stadium. With about twelve minutes remaining, the *Ahly* goalkeeper saved the ball by jumping in the air and landing on the knee of a *Zamalek* player. The referee, most likely Italian, called a penalty, and *Zamalek* scored. Riots were about to start. The goal was not posted, and no one knew who won. Both teams spent the remaining minutes on their side of the field to avoid any potential friction that could ignite the fans. I never dreamt about soccer results since then.

Throughout my school years, I must have been the shortest student in each school I attended. I built a tough personality to compensate for being short. It is easy to imagine hundreds of kids thinking they could pick on me because of my height. I trained for boxing two summers and built some muscles. I did not get into too many fistfights; but had my fair share. Eventually, I learnt to use my brains to get out of difficult situations.

My mom pushed very hard for me to be the best I could be. It felt

awkward sometimes. It sounded like nothing was ever good enough for her. No matter what grades I got, she always scolded me, telling me that I could have done better. At the end of grade nine, which was a provincial examination in Egypt, I scored eighty-seven and a half percent. Since the top student of the province was from my class, my mom initially thought it was me but then was insulted when she learned otherwise. She was going to ground me for life if not for *Essam's* intervention. At the end of grade twelve, which was when we took a national examination, I scored ninety-three and a half percent. That enabled me to enter the university of my choice and to actually receive a monetary honorarium during the first year. Most post secondary education in Egypt is free for Egyptians. This means that almost every Egyptian who graduated high school back then had a chance to enroll in a university for free.

After my final examinations in grade twelve, I had my one and only date with a real Egyptian girl. It was with a fifteen-year-old girl and I was seventeen. She told me to meet her at a bus stop downtown, which was very far from where we lived. I did not have any use for a girl at that time in my life. She had been after me for months. In any case, I went to the bus stop and waited an hour and she did not show up. I went to eat and did a few things. Three hours later, I went to the same bus stop to go home. She was there; but had only waited ten minutes for me. Egyptians are horrible with time! We went to a park another hour away by bus because I did not want to be seen with her in public. We walked in the park and she wanted to hold my hand. I asked her why; meaning why would we hold hands if we were not married? In any case, I tolerated the afternoon and never did it again. Though some Muslim boys dated girls more often in the manner I described, it is more common for people to get to know each other in family environments; meaning, a boy would meet the girl during a family get together. They would talk in front of everybody. If the boy felt a common attraction with the girl, he would send his parents to talk to hers about a potential engagement. In the engagement period, they are allowed to go out together with a chaperon; normally a lucky younger brother or sister. Often things do not work out during the engagement and they would break up. This was the level of arranged marriages that I was familiar with. There are instances of the boy just noticing the girl at his work, school or neighborhood. However, he would still send his parents to meet hers. This ensured compatibility

and familiarity. I still hold that this level of arranging is very useful and helps make marriages last longer.

Having pen pals was the thing to do before online chatting. A classmate of mine had too many pen pals and offered me one from a small town in South Germany. I had sent letters to a few myself but never got replies. I accepted his gracious offer. He gave me her letters and one photo of her, her sister and their aunt. I wrote her explaining the situation and she accepted to correspond with me. Over the 1973 summer, we became close friends. She invited me to visit her on my way back to Egypt. I needed a visa for West Germany. I applied and to my surprise was declined. I inquired and was told that Egypt had not recognized West Germany and accordingly they had no diplomatic relationship. I was saddened by this rejection. My dad consoled me and told me that we should write a letter to the Chancellor of Germany complaining about this rejection. He and I sat one evening and wrote the letter. I explained to the Chancellor that I was disappointed that friends could suffer because of petty world politics. It was a nice outlet for my frustration and I felt good after mailing it. I never expected a response. Two weeks later, I got a letter from the German Ambassador to England. He explained to me that it was not appropriate to send a letter to the Chancellor before contacting those below him like himself or the Foreign Minister. However, he explained that because of my letter, they had reviewed their policy and had decided that they would decide on each case on its own merits. He invited me to re-apply for the visa assuring me that I would get it. By then, I had lost interest and had wanted to enjoy my few remaining days of holidays with my friends in Egypt. This was a very valuable lesson though. I learnt that one should not just sit and pout. It is best to do all one can to change his situation even against much larger entities.

I am not sure if this is still the practice but high school graduates in the 1970s applied to a coordination office with their choice of university and faculty and were placed according to their grades. When it was time to apply, I was spending the summer with my dad in England. My mom filled my application for university. She had consulted with me and asked me what I wanted to apply for. I knew that she wanted me to apply for medicine. I told her, "I want to study physics and if not then engineering."

Her answer was a classic for me. “Study medicine or engineering; if you succeed or fail, you can be a physicist. If you study physics and you fail, you are nothing.” This was a gem. The first part of it proved true for me. At the end of that discussion, I was not sure what she would apply for. I had thought that she was going to apply to the faculty of medicine since this was her first choice and since she always wanted a doctor in the family. When I got back to Cairo in September from London, I was pleasantly surprised when I saw that she applied for engineering.

My academic star really shone in university. The first year in engineering was spectacular for me. The mathematics was easy. We had already covered most of it in grade twelve. I kept the same studying habits and studied courses that most students tended to avoid.

In Egypt, the universities used to Bell-curve the marks. That meant the top score received one hundred percent of the mark and all other scores were prorated based on how they compared with the top student. This failed because of me. I answered almost all of the exam questions. Students tended to answer, at most, five out of typically seven questions. The professors begged my forgiveness in that they did not include me in the Bell-curves. This made me feel special after the midterms. I was the top student by a wide margin after the final exams. I am told my record GPA in that first year in the faculty of engineering still holds today.

My record grades got me a number of privileges. A letter from the governor of *Giza* inviting me to an exclusive camp for gifted students. I received a scholarship at the university with pay equivalent to seventy-five percent of the salary of an engineer for the academic year. The biggest prize of all was my mom’s pride. She decided I had fulfilled her dream that I was, in fact, a good boy. I was free of her pushing me to study; but it was too late; it was already deeply ingrained in me.

A group of friends used to study together in the house of one friend. His dad was an engineer and this gave us a warm fuzzy feeling since we were aspiring to be engineers. I noticed the mother ran the house. She used to be the real boss. Her word was law. I later learnt this was the case about most Egyptian homes. The father would be the enforcer. Mothers were kind. However, she did share her worries with the dad and got what she wanted. Most kids would just do what their mother asked. Egyptian women were very empowered back then. They did the

jobs they wanted. They dominated many professions. They were paid the same as men. They were not drafted in the military. They had it made. In any case, I would always leave early since my mom wanted me home before midnight. One time we planned to study late. Around eleven in the evening, a group of friends showed up and it was last call for dinner since the beans restaurant was closing. One friend was famous to eat a lot. The mother asked him if he was going to eat; he replied, "I ate at home already." She ordered the right amount of *pita* bread and beans. I say the *pita* first because some of my friends would eat ten breads each. When we sat to eat, the big eater said, "Guys! Seeing you all eat gave me an appetite; I will nibble with you." We all finished and he kept on eating. The mother told him one of my most favorite lines, "From now on, you eat here and nibble at home."

Speaking of women in Egypt, I recall that when I was young the law protected women to an uncanny degree. If a woman complained that a man hit her or touched her where he should not, he would get almost an automatic six months jail sentence. If it was a marital issue where the man hit his wife and she called the police, they would arrest him and only release him if she said it was ok to do so. This was such a wonderful protection. However, women often abused it. I recall there was a woman living on our block on the street behind ours. She used to be very vulgar. She would swear using the dirtiest language. Egyptians are very poetic with their swearing. She would have won a poetry prize for her swear lines. She could go on for a minute or so with rhyming insults. She even, on occasion, hit a man or two and I am told, took their clothes off. They never retaliated because she was known to lie and could have reported that they hit her or touched her and she was merely retaliating. No decent man wanted to go to jail. In any case, this was the only woman I knew to abuse that law.

I actually had a brush with that lady (or should I say woman). In a street soccer game in 1968, her son who was a bit of a giant attacked my brother, *Ahmed*. I used a rock or something against his back to make him to let go of *Ahmed*. He must have bruised. My mom was away in England. *Essam* told me that I am on my own if that woman comes to retaliate. The next day, I heard loud knocking on our door. I went to open the door and to my surprise that woman was there with her son.

She asked, “Where is *Hatim*?” I told her, “I am *Hatim*.” She looked me up and down; slapped her son hard on the face yelling, “You fag! This little boy bruised you!” I was saved from humiliation that would have scarred me for life.

In the second year of university, there were elections for the Student Union. I was an Islamist by all definitions. However, a formal Islamic group was established calling itself, *Al Jama’a Al Islameya*. I found this contradictory since all Muslims were the Islamic group. In any case, they put forward a card in the elections and asked me to be on it. Not only did I refuse, I joined the card of the opposition group. I was not against Islam but I was against the concept that any one group is more Islamic than the rest. I never campaigned with the opposition and lost. Actually, *Al Jama’a Al Islameya* swept the elections all across the university. I was rather liberal those days. In fact, I was a bit of a clown. I had a personality contest with a colleague in that year that almost destroyed both of us; but I won. It was about who is more popular. He held the opinion that I was a bookworm and people liked me because I helped them. I was out to show him otherwise. We really tore each other apart in the process. To be clear about my Islamic activities, I was one of the few students who prayed regularly in the faculty’s prayer area. I used to pray there before most of those that joined *Al Jama’a Al Islameya* started praying there regularly. *Al Jama’a Al Islameya* used to print handouts to help the students with their studies. I often wrote those handouts. I was, in no-way, opposed to *Al Jama’a Al Islameya*; in fact, I liked them. Praying in the faculty’s prayer area taught me an important lesson. In the first year, I had a friend who was a girl. I definitely do not want to say that she was a girlfriend since this I do not want the reader to assume we had any physical relationship. In any case, I once asked her if she had prayed since I wanted to excuse myself to pray. She replied, “Do not ever ask a girl if she prayed!” I did not understand. Another friend explained that since girls do not perform the five daily prayers during their period, a girl would be obligated to tell me she was on her period if I asked on a regular basis.

Muslims have to wash their arms to the elbows, faces, and feet and wet part of their hair before they pray. This *wudu*, ablution, is mandatory if one touches human waste, sleeps, ejaculates, or passes any fluid, solids

or gas out of their body (bleeding counts). Since women bleed regularly whilst on their period, Islam eased on them and gave asked them not to pray whilst on their period. In the case of ejaculation, a Muslim must shower having water touch every part of the skin and head. I like to compare this to baptism. This means Muslims baptize regularly.

In the 1976 summer, I went to visit my pen-pal friend and her family in Germany. I had a good time but my brothers in England wanted me to spend some of the summer with them. I had not seen *Essam* since June 1975. He had married our first cousin, *Hoda*, and had moved to England where he was studying in the Imperial College. My dad had got *Essam* a job as a receptionist in the Embassy of the United Arab *Emirates*. We had been a close family and I missed him. *Essam* got *Ahmed* a job in the Embassy as an interpreter and promised me one. I worked for five weeks in a cabinet factory in Germany and then went to England. She mailed me my pay in cash and surely enough it never got to me. I had asked for the cash to be wrapped in carbon paper so that mailman could not figure out what was in the envelope; she forgot and used plain paper. I worked for six weeks in the Embassy in the finance department. I was processing the expense accounts of patients that had been flown to England at the expense of the Ambassador to be treated in English hospitals. I noticed that there were orange juice bills for over twenty Sterling Pounds, or forty dollars. I brought this to the attention of my supervisor. He winked and told me that they were Muslims and probably drank orange juice in the bar.

I worked with a Scottish girl who used to tell me all kinds of stories. I did not understand half what she said; but was always attentive and displaying the appropriate emotions. She was rich and talked about knowing the singer Rod Stewart personally and how he had visited them in their big house in Scotland. On my last day, she told me, "It is sad that the only person who understood me in London is an Egyptian and he has to leave." I did not get it straight away and was going to tell her that I had always had a hard time understanding her. However, I stopped myself as I got what she said. I think the listening skills I learnt with her stayed with me the rest of my life.

I saved the money from my Embassy job. I needed this money since if I did not have it, I would not be able to travel the following

summer. I had all my money in a wallet and headed to Victoria station to buy a train ticket back to Germany. On the bus, some one picked my pocket and I lost all my money for the second time that summer. I called my dad collect and asked him to wait for me as I took a taxi home. I got there and he paid for the taxi. He tried to console me but I was really down. I do not recall saying anything negative but definitely felt down. I was spending the night in *Essam*'s apartment about half a mile away. It was raining hard; my dad gave me an old umbrella for the road. Mid-way to *Essam*'s house, I found a homeless person lying in the rain. I asked him if I could help; he asked for my umbrella. It felt like my only possession but I immediately realized he had it much worse than I did. I gave it to him. I learnt never to be too down again.

Ahmed loaned me some money to get back to Germany. I had a great time on buses, trains, and a ferry. I spent a day in Paris. I must have walked across most of the city. I did ride a bus once to get back on time for my train. My pen-pal friend had worked much of the summer in a hospital and decided to compensate me for the lost funds. I was ok for my 1977 travels.

In the third year of university, a group of friends asked me to talk to a big guy in the group about not touching the girls. They were scared of him and thought he would not dare beat the top student of the university. I went to talk to him but decided that I should get closer to him first. This was the beginning of the closest friendship of my life. I became friends with *Syed-Amr (Sisso) ElHamamsy*. *Sisso* was such a unique character. He lived in the richest neighborhood in Cairo: *Zamalek* island on the Nile. He invited me over to chat one evening. I went to his apartment and found the butler and the cook all alone. The butler lived in my neighborhood so we had a lot to chat about. I drank tea with mint, an Egyptian favorite and browsed through *Sisso*'s library in the study. I must have been there for two hours when *Sisso* finally came to pick something up. He had forgotten all about it. This was repeated one or two more times and then he realized that I was punctual. Did I already say that Egyptians are rarely punctual with appointments? In early June, *Sisso* invited me to his birthday party. I took a bus to his house. Buses in Egypt until the late 1970s were an experience of a lifetime. There were two kinds of buses. The common ones were as cheap as half a *piaster* at

times. The superior ones were as expensive as ten or twenty-five *piasters*. The common buses were often filled beyond capacity and passengers had to often stick out of the back door in a half circle a yard deep. Some people would stand on the back bumper. Often people sat on top of buses. To add to the misery, there was a conductor who moved around the bus selling tickets. On my way to *Sisso's* birthday, I started a little later than usual so I could not be picky about buses. I took the first bus and had to hold with one hand hanging out from the back door. As the bus was going at full speed by the Nile with me hanging on for dear life, I saw the passenger sitting by the window in the last seat starting to lean out of the window. He was trying to spit. It would not come out; so he cocked his throat about ten times and I could see the spit building in his mouth. I tried to shout as loud as I could but he was totally unaware of the existence of the passengers hanging out of the door. He let go of the biggest and thickest spit I had ever seen and it landed right on my face. When I got to *Sisso's* house, I went straight to the bathroom and took a shower. The place was so full of guests no one noticed. I do not think *Sisso* knew this story before (he probably does now).

During 1976 and 1977 school years, Cairo University was closed for two weeks each year since the students demonstrated against some government policies. Mostly the demonstrations were about worsening living conditions. *Sadat* had become president in 1970; kicked out the Soviet experts that were pervasive in the Egyptian military and companies; fought Israel and won enough land to reopen the Suez Canal; and tried to liberalize the Egyptian economy. *Nasser* had prided himself on turning Egypt into a special brand of socialism. *Sadat* introduced open-market economy. Though this was a good move, it happened too fast and caused a new class of very rich people to emerge and made the poor feel poorer. Communist students missed the subsidies of the *Nasser* days and often demonstrated against *Sadat's* policies. I was asleep one afternoon on the second floor of the house. I heard my sister *Azza*, and *Adel's* wife, whom he married in 1975, *Fayza*, shouting at boys playing soccer in the street, telling them to stop playing. They tried everything to stop them. I was awoken by screams. When I went downstairs, *Azza* and *Fayza* were in the kitchen, and the kitchen was full of smoke. In my daze, I searched for the object burning and realized it was the soccer

ball. I kicked it a few times till I got it out of the house. Apparently, fate had the ball kicked into our house. *Azza* and *Fayza* were very upset and set the ball ablaze in the kitchen. Street soccer balls back then were made from a sponge core with lots of threads woven around it forming a ball. A special glue covered the thread to protect it and keep the ball in form. All outer ingredients were very combustible and the inside produced a lot of smoke. Sometimes instead of the glue, a male sock was used to protect the threads. This made for this kind of balls name, *koura sharab*, a sock ball.

This reminds me of a favorite game that kids used to play on one or two nights each Ramadan, the fasting month. We used to not eat, smoke (those who do), drink, have an intimate sexual relationship, or consume any medicine from dawn till sunset. Normally, we would get up an hour before dawn and eat a small meal and drink lots of water. The sunset meal (breakfast) would be a big meal. Life slowed down in Egypt in Ramadan. Offices closed earlier. The government often changed the time to wintertime (even in summer) to make sure sunset seemed earlier. In any case, the kids would set a sponge soccer ball ablaze during a weekend night and play soccer at night with no light but that of the ball. It used to be a fascinatingly dangerous game.

Ramadan in Egypt was very special. Just before *Ramadan* each kid would get a lantern where we put a candle and we would walk around in the evening singing thanking Allah for having brought *Ramadan* to us. It was a nice way of announcing the beginning of the month of *Ramadan*. Muslim months are governed by the cycle of the moon; they begin and end with the birth of a new moon. We would have pastries that we only make in *Ramadan*. The government increased the rations of sugar, oil and tea for *Ramadan*. The roads used to become deserted around sunset. There were cannon shots to tell people to stop eating in the morning and to start eating at night. There would be stories on the radio each night from Arabian Nights. There would be puzzles on the radio and on TV for prizes. There would be *Quran* reading at night. There would be *Quran* recitation on the radio. There were special night prayers in the mosque. A man used to walk around the streets drumming on a big drum about two hours before dawn waking people up. He would chant, "Wake up sleepy one; worship the Constant One!" Of course, we

never saw who he was. He would walk around after *Ramadan* knocking on the doors asking for a tip. The last days of *Ramadan*, everybody was involved in making *kaak* or *ma'amoul*, a date filled soft cookie, biscuits and the like. We would send these pastries to each other in plates after *Ramadan* was finished. The last two days in *Ramadan* were dedicated to shopping. This is when we got our new shoes and clothes. It was a great experience.

In the fourth and fifth (and last) year of university, we had a professor that taught us communications who was a bit of a sadist. After the first year, which was a preparatory year, we studied everything in English. This was hard on many students. During the lectures, they barely kept up with the language. Afterwards, they had to try to comprehend. That professor used to ask trivial questions like, "What is the difference between a transmission line and clothes line?" He would then ask the students that he knew do not understand the language to answer loud. They could not. We sat in the back of the class and tried hard to spare these students the humiliation but he ignored us.

In one instance, he asked a girl from my neighborhood a question; she refused to answer. He asked her for the reason. Other students told him that she does not talk to men. He told her that if she does not talk to him, she will fail his class explaining that no engineer can have that attitude. He eventually failed her that year but passed her the following one. I knew that girl. She was remarkably pretty. She became religious and decided to wear a *hijab* to cover her hair. She was remarkably white for an Egyptian and the *hijab* made her look very attractive. She decided to wear a *niqab* (a black tight net that covers the nose and mouth). Her eyes were so pretty; she wore sunglasses. Boys found the sound of her voice mesmerizing; she stopped talking to boys. I did not understand all this back then but admired her conviction.

I read much more. I kept a record of the books I read and made sure that each summer, I read more than the summer before. I read about the Second World War, the history of the world, philosophy, and self-suggestion. I did authors. Meaning, I would pick an author that I liked and then would read all the books he or she wrote. I read all the books available of *Naguib Mahfouz*, who later won a Nobel Prize in literature. I read most of the books of *Abbas AlAkkad*, I read many books of *Tawfeeq*

AlHakeem. I read most of the books of *Anis Mansour* till I learnt that most were unauthorized translations of foreign books. I read some *Quran*. We, the *Zaghloul* brothers, had put our pocket money together to buy a weekly volume of an interpretation of the *Quran*. This provided an excellent systematic studying of the *Quran*. I did not read too much of it but it was nice to have as a reference. I read a lot of translated novels. I read books about aliens and was fascinated by mysticism. I would have loved to own and read an encyclopedia.

Finally, I mastered the art of scoring marks. In the fifth year, I

scored exactly an A and not a mark above. After all, what was the point?

Shantah's Journey

At the beginning of summer holidays in 1969, my friends and I visited the nearest public library, which was about a ten-minute bus ride away. There I read an interesting illustrated story that had a profound impact on me. It was called *Shantah's Journey*.

Shantah was the younger brother of a pair of twins. They were the only sons of a rich fruit farmer. When their father died, they used a technique common in the Middle East to divide his fruit garden. The older brother divided it in two and the younger brother chose the half he wanted. When it came time for harvesting the fruits, *Shantah* noticed his brother's half yielded more than his. He told his brother, "You cheated me; you knew me well enough to know which half I was going to choose, and you positioned yourself to get the half with the better yield." His brother gladly swapped with him. When the next harvest yielded more fruits for his brother, *Shantah* decided to take matters into his own hands. He went at night to steal some fruits from his brother. When he was about to leave with the stolen fruits, an old man with a long white beard came to him and said, "It is wrong to steal from your brother." *Shantah* told him, "It is none of your business. Who are you anyways?" The old man replied, "I cannot let you steal from your brother; I am his luck." *Shantah* asked, "Where is my luck?" The old man replied, "He is asleep on a nearby mountain." *Shantah* asked if it was possible to wake him up. The old man replied, "Yes, but you have to take the long journey up the mountain." Desperate enough, *Shantah* received the directions and set out on a quest to find his luck.

Shantah met three different situations along the way. In the first instance, he met a lioness that wanted to eat him. Her cubs were sick and

she needed food for them. He told her he was too small to provide sufficient food but would ask his luck about her dilemma. Then he encountered a few old farmers who were very poor and too old to farm their land and were starving. The third situation was a king whose daughter was sick, and he offered to give his daughter in marriage and his throne to anyone who cured her. *Shantah* promised the farmers and the king to check with his luck for answers.

Shantah woke his luck up and asked him about the four issues: his fruit garden, the lioness with her sick cubs, the starving farmers, and the sick princess. His luck gave him the answers for all. He journeyed back feeling good now that he was lucky. He cured the princess but refused to marry her, saying that he was on a mission and had other things on his mind. He went to the farmers and told them they should farm their land as much as they could. As they took the shovel and began digging, they found a huge buried treasure. They were the richest men in the land. They offered *Shantah* half their fortune. He declined gracefully. He did not need their fortune, as he was a lucky guy with a fruit farm to take care of.

Shantah came back to the lioness and she asked him, “Did you find your luck?” He said, “Yes.” “Did you ask him about my cubs?” He said, “Yes. Your cubs do need to eat the flesh of a healthy fatter human that is stupid so they will be stronger.” The lioness noticed that *Shantah’s* stay with the king and the farmers had made him much bigger and commented, “Who could be stupider than you? You declined the kingdom; you declined half the greatest wealth in the lands. You came back to tell me how to cure my cubs. All of this so that you can go and farm a small fruit garden.”

Needless to say, *Shantah’s* journey ended with him being the meal for a few cubs.

This story was very instructive to me. I learned it was about programming. *Shantah* was programmed to get a good yield for his farm. He missed the point that the yield was to generate funds and that he had more funds than the fruits could ever give him through the kingdom and the farmers, but he declined both to go back to complete his program, even though the intermediate steps gave him better results.

Most of us go through life like *Shantah*. Our parents set goals for us like getting a Ph.D. from a renowned university or running a store. We believe in these goals so much that we fail to capitalize on better

opportunities when they present themselves. I always like to narrate this story because it is very telling about human nature.

The Middle Years – 1979 -1983

After we graduated in 1979, *Anwar Sadat* was in a good mood. With peace with Israel on its way, he decided to honor the topmost graduates in the field of engineering. We went and listened to him talk for over an hour. We each received a ribbon and a gold plated medal. *Hosny Moubarak* was the vice president at the time. He sat to *Sadat's* right at a table at the same time *Sadat* gave his speech, which lasted more than ninety minutes.

I received three notices right after I graduated from university: I was nominated to serve on the advisory counsel of the president; I was appointed as a teaching assistant in the department of mathematics and physics in the faculty of engineering at Cairo University; and I was to report for mandatory military service. I declined the first and accepted the second. It reduced the military service from three years as an officer to fifteen months as a soldier. Egypt demanded that all male citizens over the age of eighteen serve in the military. There were exemptions for single children and those not physically fit.

I reported for the service in October 1979 but wasn't assigned to a unit until late in November. I served diligently. There were interesting episodes I will never forget. I used to ask the sergeant what I was doing there and if it would have been more profitable for the country to use me in research. His answer was I should just obey orders. He told me Egypt paid for my education and this was my way of paying it back. I learnt then that this was a big mistake the Egyptian government did. I was grateful to Egypt for the wonderful education I had received, and if they did not ask for payback, I would have never known how to pay them

back. I would have been indebted forever.

From the end of July 1980, I worked mostly on helping a senior officer with his MSc research, which was on the protection of remote pipelines from rust using solar cells. It helped me learn how pipelines are eroded by the elements, particularly water, and how they can be protected either by placing materials that the elements would more readily attack or by adding a source of electric current.

This work on the thesis got me out of active duty. I even went back to growing my beard for the last five months of service. I also managed to do private tutoring for mathematics and got paid handsomely for it. I was a rich soldier.

During the last month of university, Schlumberger Wireline Services had come to our campus and explained about how exciting the life of their engineers was and how well they were paid. I decided I would join them. I applied before my military service, but they told me to apply again after I finished. Following their advice, I applied in January 1981. They gave me an exam and hired me within days. I was assigned to a camp in *Sinai* for training. During the second day on the job, in following my training engineer, I jumped onto a moving boat, slipped, and broke my leg. I did not want to complain and carried on working, carrying heavy tools for the evening. When we got back to camp, I requested to see a physician. I was told the closest one was about fifty kilometers away. I insisted I had to go.

They warned me I would be fired if nothing was fractured. I told them I've never fractured any bones before but heard the bone crack. I went to the hospital, and they put a cast on my left ankle. Then I had the best time of my life for the next six weeks. I had never really done nothing for any length of time before then. I always worked since I was sixteen and never had a break. I spent six weeks watching people from the balcony of our house, talked to children going to school, bought sugar cane every day and ate it with some of the school children, and got to know our neighbors.

In March, I was healed and went to Germany for two weeks for rehabilitation. I always had great friends in Germany and enjoyed their company. Arriving there limping, the only cheap place I could find was in a farmhouse. Separating the farmhouse from the town was a graveyard. Nothing fixes a limping leg better than a walk past a graveyard after

midnight.

I was finally ready to work in April and spent a month in *Sinai*. I enjoyed the work. I was then transferred to Holland for further training. After a month there, I went to a three-months training school in Scotland. It was an all-boys' camp that was wild most of the time.

Returning to Holland at the end of September 1981, I was assigned to a field engineer who would train me. Each engineer had a team of three to four technicians called operators. We then went to offshore drilling rigs, mostly via helicopters and sometimes by boat.

Helicopters landed on landing pads on the back of the offshore rigs. Boats came close to the rig, and a crane dropped a basket we had to sit in to be lifted onto the rig. Getting in and out of the basket on the boat was very tricky in rough seas. The most important thing I learned from my supervising field engineer was to be nice to the operators. I once witnessed them carrying my supervising field engineer off the side of a rig, forcing him to some concession. I swore they would never do that to me. Schlumberger had a unit on the rig with cables that would connect to electric tools that were lowered into the oil well. The tools provided measurements that helped tell if there was oil in the well and the potential for its flow if the well was being drilled or how much flow there was if the well was a producing well.

One day in October, as I went into the radio room of a rig, the radio operator asked me, "Aren't you Egyptian?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Wait here. The news is coming on in a minute; you have to watch it." And right there, I saw a military parade in what I recognized to be Cairo. My brain worked super fast. I realized it was October 6. Egypt must be celebrating the Yom Kippur war. I then saw *Anwar Sadat* standing to salute some soldiers running towards him. I was confused. There appeared to be shots. *Sadat* went down, and the announcer said *Sadat* had been shot dead hours earlier. I was shocked. I had to think of all the reasons he would have been shot and how the Egyptians must be feeling.

In November 1981, I was on a rig doing measurements to help the rig drilling team determine how deep they were stuck. The drill bit was not coming out of the well. Often the hole caves in on top of the bit. However, sometimes the pipes were stuck well above the bit. We would send tools down to measure exactly where they were stuck. They had

techniques to try to release the bit or the pipes. Some of these used force to try to pull the pipes loose. If all else failed, we would send explosives down the hole and blow the drill pipes just above the point where they were stuck. The hole would be cemented below this point and a new hole would be drilled.

One night whilst I was on this rig, things were very rough with the pulling of the pipes. The rig shook really hard. In a strange way, this relaxed me, and I slept well. Rigs have living quarters not too dissimilar of those of a ship. I slept with the operators. A room on the rig held up to four people. In the morning, I learned the equivalent of a hurricane hit the surrounding cold waters. The rig was jumping off its legs all night. I was the only one that slept through it. When I returned to land two days later, I learnt that my father, pressured by my mom, had called everyone in the company to check on me. I was upset with my parents for making me look like a child. It took me two years to realize I was still their baby.

I traveled a lot in Europe during my stay in Holland. I went to West Berlin by car. One had to drive through East Germany. Egyptians did not need a visa for East Germany. The roads connecting West Germany to Berlin were surrounded by barbed wires, and each entry and exit point had a check stop to ensure that westerners did not get out in other cities. The speed limit was one hundred kilometers per hour (sixty miles per hour) and was strictly enforced. I remember passing a check stop at one hundred thirty kilometers per hour and feeling good that they did not stop me. I slowed down but was stopped at the next check stop. I asked the policeman why he stopped me, since by then I was driving within the speed limit. He told me the earlier check stop was busy and radioed it in. When I got to the checkpoint leaving East Germany getting into West Berlin, the immigration officer asked me if I received a speeding ticket. I told him I did. He asked to see it. They stamped the time I entered East Germany, and he had a calculator that calculated I had driven too fast to make the time I did. If I did not have a physical ticket, he was going to give me another one.

I had the rare opportunity to see the Berlin wall, visit the wall museum while the wall was still there, see the sites where tunnels were dug under the wall, as well as the sites where people were shot trying to get into West Berlin. There was a tram that drove through West Berlin and actually drove over East Berlin but did not stop. It was a strange

division of a city. I drove into East Berlin and visited a number of the sites. East Germans refused to talk when I spoke to them in English. I guess they must have been nervous. When I was leaving West Berlin, I saw a military tank erected over a huge cement column. It had something written under it like, "To the glory of the Russian people."

I visited the south of France. I stayed in Cannes, Nice, and then toured inland. I saw the beautiful flamingos standing in the marshlands. It is a sight that one can never forget. I went to swim in Cannes and recall a strange scene. A woman around thirty-five or so was pulling on the bikini top her daughter was wearing. The woman was trying to get the daughter's top off so she could be topless like most of the other girls. The girl had enough decency left in her and was holding on to the top as if it was life itself. That was another sight that I will never forget.

I worked on offshore rigs until January 1983 when I asked to be relocated to Germany so I could be closer to my friends in southern Germany. I did not specify my wishes enough and ended up getting transferred to northern Germany, near Bremen.

Schlumberger was in a downsizing mode, but I was in no danger of being let go. To help with the situation and to avoid having others fired, I agreed to take all my vacation time. This was more like two or three months of paid vacation. I hitchhiked in southern France, visiting Lourdes. I read all about Lourdes and had an interesting revelation. I learnt that the Catholic Church defines a miracle as a phenomenon that cannot be explained by natural causes. I thought long about this and concluded that a real miracle is when something happens not in the usual way. Lourdes is a kind of *Mecca* for Catholics. People visited it from all over the world and a lot of miraculous healings took place there. I had to think that if medicine did not know what was wrong with someone and he was miraculously cured in Lourdes, was this really a miracle or did that person's mind play tricks on him? I had a good time, but the cold mountains made my ankle hurt. I then decided to visit Israel, which for an Egyptian, was a very strange move.

I went to the Israeli embassy in The Hague, Holland, where I had longer-term residence papers. I was stopped in an elevator between floors and a voice asked me what I wanted. I placed the photo page of my passport against a mirror that obviously was connected to a camera. I

had to strip down in the elevator, but kept my pants on. When the voice made sure I was not armed, I was allowed in. I was told that no Egyptian ever requested a visa before, but upon checking prohibitions, there were none against Egyptians who did not fight Israel. They explained it would take longer to get the visa if I did not want my passport stamped. I agreed to have my passport stamped. As always, I did not consider all the consequences thoroughly.

I made sure I traveled on a Lufthansa flight from Munich. I did not want to give business to Israelis, fearing it would support them in their activities against fellow Arabs. I was checked thoroughly before boarding the plane. When I arrived at the immigration desk in Ben Gurion airport, the surprised officer asked me, "Misraim?" which I understood to mean, Misry or Egyptian. I replied, "Yes." She told me to stand on the side. She did not know what to do with me. After all the other passengers were processed, I was interviewed by what seemed like the head of security in the airport. He asked why I was there and what I planned to do. I told him the story. He responded, "I checked the visa and it is authentic. Accordingly, I will ask you to do what I ask all others to do; get a reservation in any hotel. We need to have your exact destination on file." I asked him, "Do I have to honor that reservation? I have acquaintances I am going to call." He replied, "No." I went to the reservations desk, got any reservation, and gave it to him.

I went to visit Israeli acquaintances who lived in a nice suburb in Tel Aviv. I was told that Arabs were not allowed in Kibbutz, but they were willing to make an exception in my case. I declined the invitation, saying that I am an Arab and did not want to be treated different than other Arabs. The family, including a pilot in the Israeli air force, and I had a wonderful conversation over the next twenty hours. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I was finally talking to the other side and beginning to understand the other point of view.

I asked a lot of questions about Israeli history, as they understood it, and how they felt about the massacre of Arabs, like that of *Dir Yaseen*, which happened one month before the declaration of Israel in 1948. They denied knowing of any massacres.

There is one thing I learned from my two-day stay in Tel Aviv. Israelis were nervous. They were always weary of potential bombs. Their eyes were always scanning for suspicious objects in public places.

I felt compassion towards the population. This compassion helped erase the negative feelings I had from those June 1967 nights under the dining table.

I traveled the West Bank of the Jordan River and the three Mediterranean cities of *Akko*, *Jaffa*, and *Haifa*. I went to *Al-Aqsa* mosque, which is built on the ruins of the Solomon's Temple. The Romans destroyed the temple in their attempt to quell the Jewish uprising after Jesus' ascension. Prophet *Mohammed*, around the year 612 AD, was miraculously transported from *Mecca* to Jerusalem. He prayed with all the prophets over the ruins of the temple. He then stood on a rock and was transported to the heavens. Legend has it the rock the Prophet stood on lifted somewhat, longing to stay with the Prophet. This rock is now under the famous Dome of the Rock. In the heavens, the Prophet saw both heaven and hell and received instructions directly from God on the five daily prayers. The Archangel Gabriel taught him the exact motions of the prayer. The Prophet was told to have Muslims face the spot where he prayed with the prophets when they pray. This was later altered to the Holy Mosque in *Mecca*.

When the Muslims arrived in Jerusalem in 638 AD, they built a mosque away from the Christian churches on the site they believed *Mohammed* prayed on. Over the centuries, this has grown to be *Al-Aqsa* mosque. In reality, there are many mosques in this area, including the Dome of the Rock. In Muslim belief, *Al-Aqsa* is the entire courtyard housing all these mosques.

I prayed in both *Al-Aqsa* mosque and the Dome of the Rock, including under the rock, but the Muslim in me had not matured sufficiently to grasp the significance of these prayers. I visited the Mount of Olives and saw the graves of many prophets. I then visited the shrine where *Ibrahim* (Abraham) is buried. It was not a Muslim time. I could not go in but accepted that sharing the shrine was a good solution.

I understood why the Israelis were nervous and scared when I left Jerusalem. There was commotion at the bus terminal and people were gathered on one side. In the middle of the street were soldiers approaching a package then covering it with some metal barrel. Shortly after that, there was the sound of a detonation. It was a suspicious package found and detonated on the spot. I am sure many people were wondering if the next one would hurt or kill them.

I went to *Ein Gedi* and visited the Dead Sea. I swam in the sea and unknowingly, did what I do in all seas; I dived in with my eyes open. First, you do not sink, and second, your eyes burn like crazy for five minutes. Afterwards, I sat in the March sun drying, when a few soldiers asked me if I wanted to join them for a meal. We talked about all kinds of things. I had not figured out they thought I was an American Jew. This came up after an hour or so of chatting. When they asked about my background, I told them I was Egyptian. They were very quiet, so I got up and left to end the tension.

In *Akko* some Arabs asked me to stay in their spare apartment. One of their sons was married to a Jewish girl. This made for an interesting conversation, where I learnt that Arabs and Israelis could live harmoniously together if the politicians got out of the way.

When I returned to Germany, Schlumberger called to request I transfer to Egypt, where they needed locals to work to comply with Egyptian regulations. I worried that Egypt would be upset that I visited Israel. I went to the Egyptian consulate in Hamburg and replaced my passport. I called a school friend who had connections in the Egyptian intelligence services to inquire about my fate once in Egypt. He told me that Egypt and Israel both intercept the passengers' lists of airplanes landing in the other country and that Egypt already knew that I had been in Israel. They also knew that no harm was done.

I went to the worksite in *Abu Rudais, Sinai* but did not like the environment much. Instead of working, I drifted in *Sinai* and Cairo for six weeks. I visited St. Catherine's monastery, actually arriving late and saw the youth hostel was full. I begged the attendant to let me spend the night even on the floor. He would not budge. A priest heard my pleas and asked me to step into the monastery to be interviewed. He told me because I am a Muslim I should know how to respect a religious place. I acknowledged I did. He then agreed I could stay in the monastery for the night. This was such a privilege and a blessing. Housed inside this monastery is the burning bush of Moses. I ate the hard bread representing the main diet of the Greek Orthodox priests, which was cold but spiritually uplifting.

I climbed Mount *Sinai* in April and was surprised to see snow on top its peak. The sight of snow in Egypt just seemed wrong. I then went

to Cairo and enjoyed the streets, including the area of the mosque of *Al Hussein*. *Al Hussein* was the grandson of Prophet *Mohammed* who was slain in 680 AD, during the battle of *Karbala*, Iraq. *Imam Hussain* was slain with a small group of disciples. He was, at the time, an *Islamic* religious symbol. Some consider this slaying as the pivotal divide between the *Sunni* and *Shiite* communities. I went to work for a few days in May but did not enjoy the inequities I witnessed, in that Egyptian engineers were treated different than others. I came to a good arrangement with Schlumberger and took an indefinite leave of absence. They had an extra Egyptian on their workforce in Egypt. I had not made up my mind whether I was quitting or not. We agreed to let each other know when it was over. We all won.

I used my time in *Sinai* productively. I visited St. Catherine's monastery repeatedly and *Sharm el-Shaikh*. I climbed Mount Moses and grew closer to my religious roots. I used my time in Cairo more productively and learnt to be a son to my mom. I spent time with my nephews and niece from *Magda*, taking them to the zoo, where I convinced my young niece the bear was calling her name. I spent a lot of time with my relatives.

This was 1983. The Russians had invaded Afghanistan and I heard they committed a lot of atrocities against the Muslim civilians. I thought I needed to do my part, so I decided to go to Afghanistan and do whatever I had to do.

I left Egypt in June 1983, looking for myself and looking for some truths. I was totally disillusioned about the Egyptian government. In May of that year, if my memory serves me right, President *Hosny Mubarak* gave a speech about how the oil sector's profits were all wasted on bread subsidy, that the Egyptians ate the oil they produced. What I learnt that day was no president of any organization should sit in a meeting with his constituency and detail the problems he is facing without giving them solutions. If that happens, it is time for that president to step down. I had been making so much money with Schlumberger; I had tipped restaurant servers with twenty-pound tips, forgetting this topped their monthly salary at the time. The looks they gave me sometimes broke my heart. I wanted to share my little new found wealth with all the poor people I saw; and I saw lots of them. I realized if I

wanted to truly help them, I needed to leave and build a large nest egg to start from.

Sinai – A Fictional Story

It is well known in Egypt that there is a village somewhere in *Sinai* that holds the name of where children not only listen to their parents, but also do whatever they tell them to do. Not much else is really known about the village. Naturally, I decided to go and learn more about it. Those who visited that part of the world will probably remember that on the main highway leading to the monastery of St. Catherine, few kilometers before the valley of *Firan*, there is a valley with huge stone figures that could have been made by the continuous wear of sandstorms. Somewhere in the valley lay the village of *Sinai*. This I learnt from some Darwish in Cairo, who knew what I was looking for and gave me a very clear description of the way to the village.

I packed my backpack and headed there on a long bus ride. There was no designated bus stop, so I asked the driver to drop me off. It was a long walk to the village, which seemed much longer in the afternoon sun. The sun was almost set when I arrived. I looked around for some time and saw no one. There was nothing in the neighborhood that looked like a village. I could not see much because of the dark. I should start early in the morning, for as they say, morning has better eyes.

I did not expect any hotels in the area, so I chose a good spot for camping, collected some firewood – more like dry weeds – and started a fire. There were no water wells in the vicinity, so I used water miserly to make myself a pot of dark sweet tea. I sat in front of the fire, drinking my tea, listening to the night wind whistling past the cliffs. The sand

was very busy making more figures, I thought. I doubted whether I found the place. I took out the worn piece of paper with the road descriptions and brought it close to the fire trying to remember the marks I passed by. I was feeling very tired and cold. I unfolded the black military wool bed sheets, put two on the ground, and laid on top, covering myself with the third. I started reading in the Holy *Quran*, when I suddenly heard, "Can we join you for some tea?"

I was startled, for I had not heard any footsteps. I looked up and saw three men.

"Of course. Please do come and sit. I will have to put the pot back in the fire." I made some room on the bed.

"That is very kind of you."

I poured the tea out on the ground, put fresh water in the pot and put it in the fire. And then I looked in their faces, which were dark and very interesting. They looked alike but not of the same age. They could have belonged to three different generations.

"Are you family?"

"Yes. How did you know? Actually, this here is my father and this is my son. We came when we saw the fire. We knew you were a stranger. We feared you might be lost, so we came to offer our help. Is there any way we can be of service?"

"No, I mean yes. I do not know if I am lost or not."

"Where were you heading to? This place could not have been your destination."

"I am heading to *Sinai*."

"You must know that this semi-island we are on is called *Sinai*!"

"I am looking for the village *Sinai*."

"Are you sure? Nobody has asked for *Sinai* the village since Moses."

"I am sure."

"Looking for someone in particular?"

"Not really, I would like to talk to anyone."

"Well, you have made it to *Sinai*. We live here. Do you want to talk to us?"

"Certainly. But, you look normal!"

"What did you expect to find? Statues?"

“I do not know. I just expected you to be different.”

“Why should we be any different?”

“I heard that you have a tradition to listen to your parents and even to do what they tell you to do.”

“This has some truth to it. But why should it make us any different? Does not everyone do the same?”

“Not really.” I was surprised they did not know they were the only people doing that.

“Why don’t you do what your father tells you to do? Moreover, why don’t you listen to him in the first place?”

I needed some time to figure out the answer, for I never thought of this before. They were very patient. I finally said, “I never really appreciated what my father had to tell me. It must have all started when I was a little boy. I listened a lot then, but I didn’t pay attention. My parents were often wrong. So, naturally I decided to do things my way. With time, I promoted this habit of not listening to their words. I thought it was a waste of time to listen attentively if I wasn’t going to follow their advice anyway.”

“Son, your words explained it all. It must be that your parents never really listened to their own parents. Their advice to you was based upon their own wisdom that they gained from what they went through in their lives.”

It was so simple. The stories I learnt when I was young about my grandparents told me how often they, too, were wrong. My parents must have come to a decision not to listen to them carefully.

“Now, in their case,” I said, “...in your case...”

“As far back in history as we know, everyone has listened to his parents, learnt from them, what they went through, and did what they told him to do. I have to obey my own dad for he was never wrong.”

“The same goes for me. You were never wrong dad.”

“It runs in us – to listen to our parents. Experiences in life are transferred over from one generation to the next. Each generation adds to this heritage their own experiences and updating of old ones. What we know and trust is not only our own sufferings from our mistakes, but also that of past generations.”

“This is true wisdom.”

“Yes, son. This is what wisdom is.”

“But how can I break the chain of lack of wisdom in our society?”

“Listen to your parents.”

“But you yourself said that they are often wrong because they never listened to their own parents.”

“I was only commenting on what you pointed out. I only asked you to listen.”

As he said this, I could not resist sleep any longer and I fell into a deep sleep.

When I awoke in the morning, it was because of the bright sun straight into my eyes. I was going to collect more weeds for fire, when I remembered the long conversation of the night before. I sat down on my bed sheets, recollecting what happened. I could not find out where they came from or where they went to. I looked all around me, but there was nothing. Well, not really nothing. There were those huge stone figures. For some unknown reason, I decided to have a closer look at them. To my surprise, they were more like statues. Most were broken or chipped,



were intact. Sure enough, they looked exactly like my three guests. I realized it was time to go home.

On the bus, I couldn't think of anything. In my ear, there was the ringing of his voice, "All I asked you for is to listen."

A Brief History of Egypt and Its Surroundings

Early History

I do not want to go back to the Pharaohs' time, but it is important to give a summary of Egypt's history. Egypt is an ancient civilization – probably over seven thousand years old. This reminds me of a conversation I had with the principal of a Christian school in the United States. He had told me, "All our education is based on the Bible." Being a scientist, I had to ask, "How do you explain to the kids that the world is only around four thousand years old according to the Bible?" He smartly pointed out, "We explain that God created the world four thousand years ago but he gave it the appearance of age." I wondered to myself if this principal ever visited the pyramids or if he assumed that the pyramids were created by God.

Originally, the Pharaohs ruled Egypt and much of Sudan. What is interesting about Egyptians is that we have very few words in our language that date back to the Pharaoh's days. We have no ancient Egyptian mythology or fairy tales. Mothers do not tell their kids, "Get in or the Pharaoh will come and make you disappear." I am told the word we use to ask a baby if they want water, *ambou*, is an ancient word.

Possibly, the word for sugar, *sukkar*, is also an ancient one. We still build big structures around our graves. *Islam* forbade having those structures on the grave, so we constructed the graves underground in prepared rooms and built edifices around the covered stairwell.

Funeral ceremonies in southern Egypt are reminiscent of ancient Egyptian processions. Until 1970, we used to celebrate the Loyalty of the Nile festival in the middle of August. This was a Pharaonic festival to sacrifice a virgin into the Nile, appeasing its god so the flood does not cause much damage. However, other than these simple connections, we are disjointed from the Pharaohs. The *Quran* tells us Pharaoh and all his clan drowned chasing Moses (peace be upon him) and the Israelites. The *Quran* tells us that the body of the Pharaoh was preserved. The Israelites returned to Egypt safely some time after the drowning.

After the Pharaohs' demise, Egypt was controlled by various groups: first the Persians, who destroyed many of the Egyptian statues and temples. The Greeks came around 332 BC with Alexander the Great, who established Alexandria and appeared to have ruled justly. Alexander the Great may have been the man mentioned in the *Quran* as *zul-Qarnain*, the man with two horns. Alexander put Egypt under Egyptian rule but kept the military under Macedonian command. Egypt flourished as a philosophy and science center.

The last ruler to rule Egypt under this state founded by Alexander, the Ptolemy state, was Cleopatra. Cleopatra was a very intelligent woman who felt threatened by the Roman Empire. She had an affair with the famous Roman Emperor Julius Caesar. It was this affair that became part of the reason for Caesar's famous assassination by his stepson Brutus. She then married Mark Antony, believing he had won the battle to be Caesar's successor. Mark Antony gave large parts of the Roman Empire to Cleopatra's children. This angered the Roman Senate. Finally, in the year 35 BC, Octavian, later named the Emperor Augustus, conquered Egypt and ended Cleopatra's rule.

Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) visited Egypt in his infancy and lived there some time. He even preached in churches in old Cairo. There is a church in *Matareyah*, north of Cairo, where a wood tub made within a tree trunk can be seen. It is believed Mary used to bathe Jesus in that tub. Egypt was a major Christian center, where St. Peter was narrated to

have visited for long periods of time. The Egyptians did not believe exactly the same as the Romans when Constantine adopted Christianity around 300 AD. Egyptians used to read different gospels. When the Romans set out persecuting people who believed differently, many of those gospels were buried. Some of these writings have been excavated in *Nag Hammadi* in southern Egypt.

When the Roman Empire declined and broke into Byzantine and Rome, Egypt became part of the Eastern Empire: Byzantine. Egypt had its own Roman king. When Prophet *Mohammed* established the Muslim government in *Medina*, he sent envoys to other kings and rulers. He sent an envoy to the King of Egypt: *Al-Moqawqas*. The letter Prophet *Mohammed* sent *Al-Moqawqas* is still around. I have a replica of it in my office. It basically sent peace greetings to those who followed the guided path. It invited him to the path of *Allah*, so that he and his people are saved.

Al-Moqawqas was coy. He sent Prophet *Mohammed* gifts, including a slave girl that *Mohammed* married. She is known in *Islam* as Coptic Maria. *Al-Moqawqas*, however, conceded there was a prophet that would appear before the End of Times. but he claimed this prophet would come out in Syria and not Arabia. On this ground, he did not adopt *Islam*. Prophet *Mohammed* said because *Al-Moqawqas* was coy, he would not die as king of Egypt. About twenty years later, by 641 AD, conflict arose. An army of three thousand Muslims overwhelmed the ten thousand-strong Roman garrison in Alexandria. The Muslims then built a new capital in *Al-Fustat*, part of present day Cairo.

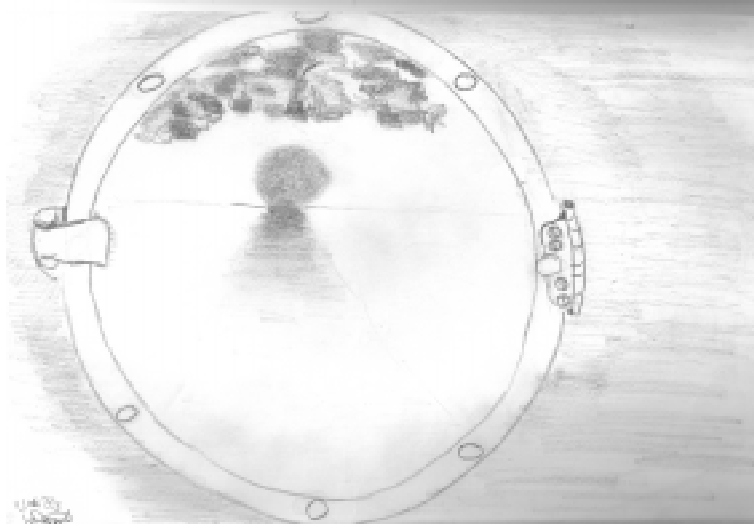
Islam was not forced on the Egyptians. Muslims acted as protectors. Accordingly, they levied a reasonable protection tax (*jizya*) on non-Muslim citizens. Muslims had to pay a portion of their savings as *Zakah*, alms, and join the army in case of conflicts. Over the following three hundred years, Egypt came to its current level of its ninety to ninety-five percent Muslim population.

Egypt was part of the *Medina* Caliphate, the Damascus *Umayyad* Caliphate, and the Baghdad *Abbasid* Caliphate. In 969 AD, a Muslim army from Tunisia conquered Egypt and established a *Fatimid* state. They also built the city of *Al-Qahira*, Cairo. The *Fatimids* constructed a beautiful wall around Cairo. A channel on the top of the wall carried

fresh water from the Nile to various parts of Cairo. Remnants of this wall can be seen in Cairo today. The *Fatimids* established *Al-Azhar* mosque and university in Cairo that is said to be the oldest operating university in the world. They were *Shiites*, who believed that Muslim rulers should be all descendants of *Mohammed* through his daughter *Fatima Al-Zahraa*.

The *Fatimid* state lasted for about two hundred years. The *Ayyubid* family, a Kurdish family ruling Syria, informed Egyptians the *Shiite* concept of *Fatimite* Caliphate was wrong. They fought the *Fatimids* out of Egypt. Shortly after that, around 1183, *Saladin*, through a series of victories and peace agreements, drove the Crusaders out of Jerusalem after one hundred years of Christian rule, during which, the Dome of the Rock became a church. *Saladin* fought such noble warriors as King Richard, the Lion-Hearted, of England and was respected by his friends and his foes alike.

The *Ayyubid* family ruled Egypt for less than one hundred years. The last of their rulers went by the name *Shajarat-ud-Dorr*, The Tree of Jewels. *Shajarat-ud-Dorr* was the last of three women that ruled Egypt (after Cleopatra and the ancient Pharaoh *Hatshibsoot*). The *Mamlooks*, *Mamaleek*, foreign paratroopers, ruled Egypt under the authority of the *Abbasid* Caliph. This went on for about two hundred years until the Tatar destroyed the *Abbasid* capital Baghdad and killed almost all of its citizens. The *Mamlooks* decided that they would be next and decided not



Tatar in *Ain Jalut* (the spring of Goliath) in Palestine and chased them past modern day Turkey. The *Mamaleek* brought back the reigning *Abbassid* Caliph and gave him a safe haven in Cairo for some time.

Egypt in the Middle Ages

Around 1517, the *Mamaleek* lost to the Ottomans outside Cairo. Egypt became part of the Ottoman Empire and formally stayed under Ottoman rule until after the First World War. Napoleon occupied Egypt in 1799. Napoleon wanted to destroy the Egyptians' morale and bombarded the pyramids with his canons. He managed to break the top of the largest pyramid and the nose of the Sphinx. The Egyptians continued to rebel against the French until they left in 1801. Shortly after that, *Mohammed Ali*, an Albanian, led a revolt against the rest of the leaders in Egypt and consolidated power under his authority. He first began as an appointee of the Ottoman Caliph, but later decided he was not content with that. He had greater aspirations and attacked *Asatana*, Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The British came to the aid of the ailing Ottoman Empire and destroyed the Egyptian navy. *Mohammed Ali* settled back as an appointee of the caliph, but with authority over a large territory, including *Hijaz*, where *Mecca* and *Medina* were located. *Mohammed Ali* had an ambitious industrialization plan for Egypt that was frustrated by his defeat to the caliph. His descendants ruled Egypt until 1953.

Ismail Pasha authorized the digging of the Suez Canal and gave the French and British a hundred-year concession to run the Canal until 1969. He spent so much money on the preparations for the opening of the Canal that he pushed Egypt into debt. The British later used the excuse of securing the debt to send their troops into Egypt in 1882.

The Egyptians revolted against the British numerous times. Of note is the 1909 revolution led by *Moustafa Kemal* and the 1919 revolution

of *Sa'ad Zaghloul*. During the British rule, Egypt strayed further away from the Ottoman Empire and from the concept of a united *ummah* (a Muslim nation). I personally believe that whilst the British and French colonized much of the Muslim world, they could not really alter the way Muslims believe in God or their personal ways of worship. What they did achieve was to end the concept of *bay'aa* (allegiance). *Bay'aa* is the concept where one Muslim accepts that another knows more than he does *Islamically* and promises to obey him in religious matters. Of course, all matters are religious in *Islam*. There is no separation between religion and government in *Islam*; nor is separation needed. *Islam* grants that separation with verse 2:252 of the *Quran*: "There is no compulsion in religion." Muslims are not allowed to force anybody into *Islam* nor force their moral code on others. Now all Muslims must give *bay-aa* to someone else so there is order in the society. Until 1926, most Muslims gave their *bay-aa* to the Ottoman Caliph. The caliphate was very weak towards the end but very effective when strong. Without a caliph, Muslims live in some form of anarchy. *Islam* is a very empowering religion where the Prophet *Mohammed* is narrated to have said, "If you do not like something evil that you are witnessing, change it with your hands. If you cannot, then change it with your tongue. If you cannot, then change it with your heart; and that is the weakest of belief." This is the strongest message in religion to action. So what stops this anarchy of individuals taking matters into their own hands? A central Muslim government that tells Muslims at large what is right and what is wrong. The balance is between individual empowerment and obedience to a Muslim government.

Bay-aa died a slow death. It first disappeared from Persia, Iran, that announced that their official method is *Shiite* whereby they believed that *Ali*, the cousin of Prophet *Mohammed*, was more worthy to lead the *Ummah* after the death of *Mohammed* than his life-long companion, *Abu Bakr* who actually did lead. Most Muslims including *Ali* accepted the rule of *Abu Bakr*. Arabs considered anyone younger than forty to be a youth. It was unthinkable to appoint *Ali* (who was in his thirties) as caliph. A few years after the death of the Prophet, the Muslims conquered Persia but had a technical problem: how do you apply the code to such a large piece of land? Originally when the Muslims won in battle, they

took the enemy soldiers as slaves and divided their belongings as spoils of war. They even divided the lands. Foes were spared this fate if they accepted to become Muslims or paid a head tax, *jizyah*. Persia was too big to be divided up between the combatants. There were too many people in too vast a territory to enslave. The second Caliph *Omar* decided not to enslave them. He gave them more freedoms than earlier foes. However, the Persians still did not like that their empire had been totally annihilated by the Muslims. They carried a grudge. This grudge came out in their accepting *Islam* (on their terms): they declared hatred of all the original caliphs and that *Ali* was more worthy to become caliph than the rest of the believers. They also hated the second wife of the Prophet, *Aisha*, the daughter of *Abu Bakr* and accused her of inappropriate actions, though the *Quran* acquitted her of them. They called themselves, *Shiite*, which is short for *Shiite-Ali* or the followers of *Ali*. The term itself is inappropriate in *Islam*. All Muslims should follow the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*, the method and tradition of Prophet *Mohammed*.

Iran formally declared itself *Shiite* in the late sixteenth century and actually fought the Ottomans. This war kept the famous Ottoman Caliph, *Suleiman* the Magnificent, too busy to conquer Vienna and the rest of Europe. British spies in Istanbul declared that once *Suleiman* had his hands free from the battles in Persia, he would quickly conquer Europe. This never really happened. The Ottoman advances in Europe ended in 1690, when they lost conclusively in the second siege of Vienna and had to accept severe terms for the ensuing peace. Losses mounted with a loss in Russia, where for the first time, they surrendered Muslim lands permanently to non-Muslims. Chechnya was part of that settlement. Catherine the Great, the Russian Empress, said, "It is a day like never was in Russian history."

The influx of European armies into Muslim lands, together with the apparent sell-out of Muslims by the caliph, helped kill the concept of *bay-aa*. Muslims thought of the caliphate as traitors and were ready to betray them back.

In the late eighteenth century, a preacher from the Arabian Peninsula, named *Mohammed ibn* (son of) *Abdul Wahhab*, rose in *Hijaz* and called for reformation of the Muslim world. He wanted a puritan *Islam*, free of all alterations that were introduced after the Prophet. Many of the things he called for were good, such as stopping the visiting of the graves of

holy people expecting miraculous cures or successes, unifying Muslim prayers behind one Imam rather than many Imams each having their own method of belief. *Ibn Abdul Wahhab* died a natural death in 1792. However, his supporters, the family of *Saud*, turned militant and threatened the caliphate. The caliph requested Egypt quell the rebellion, which they did by capturing the head of the *Saud* family at the time and delivering him to *Asatana* where he was executed. However, as two Muslim armies fought, they exchanged points of view and *Wahhabism* found its way into Egypt with the returning army. The *Saud* family re-emerged shortly afterwards and consolidated control over most of the Arabian Peninsula. They declared their land a kingdom by the name the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia around 1930. The first king was *Abdul Aziz bin Saud*. When he died, he left many sons who gave the kingdom to the eldest son *Saud*, and following his death to the second eldest, *Faisal*, and so on. The current ruler, *Abdullah*, is one of these sons. A little known fact is that as a reward for the Egyptian rulers, they became the custodians of Mecca and Medinah from 1820s until the 1950s. This was a great honor.

During the First World War, European forces occupied most of the Muslim world that stretched from Morocco in the west to western China in the east and from central Caucasus north to India and the Sahara Desert south. The Ottomans committed the fatal mistake of joining in the war against the British, the French, and their allies. This was the kiss of death for the Ottoman Empire. To make things worse, in an apparent attempt to secure the support of the Jews during the war, Lord Balfour, the British Foreign Minister, announced in November 1917 that the Jewish people could have their own state in Palestine. Palestine was under British rule at the time, but most of its population was Arab. The Arabs like to say, “The Balfour promise was a promise from someone who did not own to a people that did not deserve.” In September 1922, the United States Congress passed a resolution supporting replicating the Balfour Declaration. The Balfour declaration was not an internationally adopted document. It is important to note that early Zionists did not insist on having a Jewish state in Israel. They were musing with the idea of having it in Argentina.

At the end of the First World War, European armies, led by the

Greeks, captured Turkey and temporarily halted the caliphate. The Ottomans were at a loss. A decorated general by the name *Moustafa Kemal* dropped the Muslim cause and called for fighting for the motherland. He had a lot of success with this call and liberated Turkey. He quickly passed a number of laws limiting the power of the caliph. He declared a new state called Turkey with himself named as president, dropped the Arabic alphabet, and made closer ties with Europe. He abolished the caliphate altogether in 1926. *Moustafa Kemal* earned the title, Ataturk, the father of the Turks.

With the rest of the Muslim world under British, French, and Italian rule, rebellions flared everywhere. The occupying forces needed the help of different peoples in either supporting them in the battlefield or to, at least, stay quiet so as not to need more forces away from the battlefields. Most complied. As the war came to an end, the leaders that cooperated with the occupying forces wanted to cash in: they wanted their own kingdoms. This was accelerated once the caliphate was abolished. The Muslims without a caliph were like a headless chicken. It was an invitation: each chieftain for himself. Quickly, many small states were announced. *Al-Sharif Hussein* declared himself the king of Arabia, the Peninsula, Trans-Jordan (both sides of the Jordan River), Iraq, and Syria. In his life, he lost most of the Peninsula to Saudi and other *Shaikhs* who announced their own fiefdoms. *Al-Sharif's* children were appointed kings of various parts of land and slowly lost pieces of their kingdoms.

Egypt was the first to officially gain its independence from the British through a 1922 treaty. *Sa'ad Zaghloul* was asked to become the prime minister of Egypt. He led *Al-Wafd* Party in forming a government. However, British forces stayed protecting the Suez Canal concession. In 1928, the brewing of *Wahhabism* in Egypt resulted in that *Hassan Al-Banna* announced the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood. In fairness, *Al-Banna* had a good balance between *Wahhabism* and *Sufism*. *Sufism* is spiritual Islam and is frowned upon by *Wahhabis*. The Brotherhood restored *bay-aa* amongst their ranks. Originally, the Brotherhood had a militant arm that executed some of the politicians that stood in their way, including the prime minister of Egypt. This ultimately led *Farouk*, the king of Egypt, to order the assassination of *Al-Banna* in 1949. The Brotherhood was a thorn in the back of the British. The British were their first targets.

The sudden assassination (and when was an assassination not sudden?) of *Al-Banna* left the Brotherhood without a true leader. *Al-Banna* was charismatic and his writings were very convincing. *Al-Banna's* writing detailed the building of the individual but failed to explain when does the Brotherhood cross the finish line. His successor was hardly a talker and had appeared to provide no vision for the movement. The Brotherhood is probably the best systematic organization in building a Muslim character, but thus far they failed to recognize when they had completed the character building and should shift to nation building or taking control over a country.

The Muslim world watched with amazement as the superpowers of the time shred Europe into pieces during the Second World War. *El-Alamein*, Egypt was the scene for a decisive desert war between German General Erwin Rommel and British General Bernard Law Montgomery. The British won and ended the axis advance in Northern Africa. The Second World War alone proved the statement, "Most wars are because of religion," wrong. It was not a religious war. More were killed in it than in all other wars combined. I believe that WWII caused two things: Europe learned violence did not pay; the United States and the Soviet Union thought they ruled the world.

In May 1948, British forces left Palestine and Israel declared its existence. Between 1917 and 1948, the Jews actively purchased lands from Arabs and formed gangs to defend Jewish interests and to occasionally coerce Arabs into selling or kill those refusing to sell thus confiscated their properties. In 1947, the United Nations studied the situation in Palestine and passed a resolution declaring a Jewish state extending from Eilat on the Red Sea Gulf of Aqaba to Southern Lebanon and from the Mediterranean Sea to west of Jerusalem. Jerusalem itself was the subject of a separate study. The Arabs rejected the UN resolution and chose to fight Israel. In May 1948, Jordan's and Egypt's armies fought the Israelis and came to a standstill. Arab civilians felt caught in the middle and were encouraged by both sides to leave their homes until the fighting settled. Well, it is estimated that the number of refugees resulting from this exodus is now well over five million. They live in homes made of tin without many of the simple necessities of life. Most of the refugee camps were concentrated on non-Israeli Palestinian lands in the West Bank of the Jordan River and in the Gaza strip on the border

with Egypt. However, some were in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. It is currently estimated that seventy percent of Jordanians were originally Palestinians.

Eventually the Arabs accepted the status quo but maintained a state of hostility with Israel, encouraging an insurgency, led by Palestinians against Israel. This has guided them to a very uncomfortable coexistence.

The Nasser Years

In 1952, some disenchanted soldiers, who fought Israel and felt betrayed by the Egyptian king, formed the Free Officers group, led by a young charming colonel by the name of *Gamal Abdul Nasser*. He and his friend Colonel *Abdul Hakeem Amer* planned to overthrow the king. They solicited the help of a top popular general, *Mohammed Naguib*. *Nasser* was very clever. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood and learnt all their secrets while soliciting their help.

In July 1952, while *Nasser* and *Amer* had the alibi of being in a movie theatre, *Mohammed Naguib* led a group of officers and took over the royal palaces in Cairo in a peaceful coup. Three days later, King *Farouk* relinquished the throne to his underage son *Fouad II*, under the guardianship of *Mohammed Naguib*, and left Egypt on his yacht to Italy. In 1953, the king was dethroned, and *Mohammed Naguib* became the first president for a few months. Shortly after that, *Nasser* took over and imprisoned *Mohammed Naguib*. *Nasser* was impressed by such national leaders like *Moustafa Kemal* and his drive to unite the Turks. He also admired Hitler and his propaganda machine that turned Germany into a superpower from the ashes of defeat in a few years. *Nasser* raised the flag of Pan-Arabism (movement of Middle East Arabs towards ethnic nationalism). He wanted to unite the Arabs under his leadership. His first targets were the monarchs. He orchestrated a coup in Iraq against a son of *Al-Sharif Hussein*. He worked with and on the Syrians until they peacefully united with Egypt in 1958 to form the United Arab Republic, only to break up in 1961.

Nasser invited the Brotherhood to participate in ruling Egypt. He offered them four influential ministries: police, justice, education, and religion. They refused, believing they were not ready to rule. This angered *Nasser*. He retaliated by canceling religious Sharia courts. Egyptians, until 1953, had the right to choose which law they wanted to be tried with: Sharia, the Muslim code, or a civil law based on the French system. In October 1954, there was an assassination attempt on *Nasser* in a mosque in Alexandria. It was rather theatrical where someone tried to shoot him. *Nasser* broadcast, "Shoot me! Shoot me! I will die for this country." The next day, *Nasser* used his knowledge of the Brotherhood and their set up to capture all its leaders and put them in jail. Surprisingly, new jails were conveniently built to accommodate the thousands. This crackdown caused many of the leaders to flee to countries that opposed *Nasser's* call to Arab unity, namely, Saudi, Algeria, and Britain.

In 1954, eager to score some successes, *Nasser* agreed to relinquish Egyptian millennia-old control over Sudan, in a concession that even the king refused to give, so the British forces would agree to leave Egypt. Sudan became a free country after that, and the British forces did start to leave. The last troops left in June 1955.

In 1956, *Nasser* nationalized the Suez Canal operations breaking the hundred-year concession that was due to lapse in 1969. Britain and France retaliated by attacking Egypt to retake the Canal. Israel found an opportunity to overwhelm Egypt and took *Sinai*. The Egyptians fought bravely in Port Said and kept the British and French armies away from the Canal. According to Egyptian history, we beat the three armies and forced them out of our lands. *Nasser* was a spin master who managed to turn every situation into a public relations opportunity. We never knew that the American president sent an ultimatum to the British and the French, and then to Israel, ordering them to halt their attacks. We did not know Israel was in *Sinai* for a long time until ordered to leave by the US. We did not know there were international observers in *Sharm-el-Shaikh* monitoring the peace.

In his early years as president, *Nasser* tried to build the Egyptian economy and give better opportunities to the poor masses. He took credit for the free education that was instated in 1951 by a blind Egyptian thinker, *Taha Hussein*, before the 1952 coup. However, he did establish

many more schools. He nationalized most companies. This may have been a good step; however, he instated members of the Free Officers group as the heads of those companies. To increase profits, they cut maintenance programs, and hence, destroyed the future of the companies. *Nasser* mandated that fifty percent of the parliament would be assigned to farmers and factory workers. This gave him an assured majority for every vote in the parliament. Arguably, the 1952 change was needed, but the army should have given the country back to civilian rule so trained economists could manage the economy and seasoned politicians could run the country. Egypt is still under military rule.

Nasser wanted to build a dam south of Aswan in southern Egypt to help regulate the Nile waters, prevent flooding, generate electricity, and build a reservoir of water to fight drought. This was a great idea but the World Bank requested more studies on the impact of the dam. *Nasser* was insulted by the refusal to finance the dam and immediately took his business to the other camp: the Soviet Union. Egypt became a Socialist country. Soviet engineers helped build the dam. Soviet weapons flowed into Egypt. Soviet experts were everywhere. The socialist coalition was established basically for running the country. Egypt opposed everything American and initiated an anti-American propaganda campaign. At the height of that campaign in 1964-66, Egypt continued to receive American aid, and students, including me, once in a while were served American bread for meals in school.

Nasser took his campaign to unite the Arabs further by the early sixties. He orchestrated a coup in Yemen and appointed an allied president there. My uncle became the Minister of Health in Yemen. Saudi Arabia felt threatened by a *Nasserite* presence in the Arabian Peninsula and financed an insurgency against the pro-*Nasser* regime. Egypt sent the best of its army to defend the *Nasserite* government. Another uncle of mine served in the military there. The Egyptian army had a very hard time fighting the insurgency. There was no way of labeling the rebels, except that they were *Wahhabi* Muslims. It is said that the military thinkers in the Egyptian army came up with the devilish plan to bombard the mosques frequented by these *Wahhabi* Muslims during the Friday prayer for a sure hit.

In 1965, Egypt executed *Syed Quth*, a prominent leader of the

Muslim Brotherhood, on charges of conspiracy to kill the president and plan a coup. In the period around the execution, the government announced it found many weapons caches around the country to show that the Brotherhood had the means to execute a coup. Not one preacher in Egypt commented about the execution of a Muslim scholar by the government. It was almost a non-event. As time passed, we saw more and more of *Syed Qutb's* writings and now recognized he was, in general, one of the best thinkers of our times.

Whilst the Egyptian army was busy with insurgents in Yemen, Israel made some noises about planning to attack Syria. *Nasser* was an easy target for manipulation. He immediately closed the Suez Canal and asked the international observers in *Sharm-el-Shaikh* to leave. This put the world on notice that Egypt might attack Israel in June 1967. On June 5, Israel attacked Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, capturing many times its size in land. For the first four days of this six-day war, Egypt claimed it downed hundreds of Israeli planes and that our armed forces were totally in control. On the eve of June 9, *Nasser* went on national TV to declare we actually lost the war and that Israel could enter Cairo. He alerted us to our duty of civil defense of our capital. He then stepped down. The Egyptians took to the streets (I joked long afterwards and said in their underwear) and begged *Nasser* to stay. It may have been an act of love or maybe it was orchestrated by the socialist coalition. In either case, *Nasser* obliged and returned to power. He rounded up all the heads of the military, the intelligence service, blamed them for the disaster, and gave them long prison sentences. In 1967, Egypt's pride was scarred by a massive loss to Israel, whereby Israel captured the *Sinai* Peninsula for over a decade. What I learnt the most at the impressionable age of ten from the 1967 war with Israel was that governments lie. This was very important. It taught me to read between the lines. I learnt to model the truth based on the facts I know. This model had to be flexible and changeable when new facts occurred or when previous facts were falsified. This lesson was probably the most important lesson of my life.

My dad, who by 1965 was an announcer in the Arabic section of the British Broadcasting Corporation in London after being a secretary in the Egyptian embassy in London, told a story about the June 9, 1967 announcement of *Nasser's* resignation. Most broadcasters were too afraid

to make the announcement because they were afraid of reprisals to them or their families by the *Nasser* regime. When it came my dad's turn to decline, he surprised his bosses by saying he would, provided he could word the announcement in his own language. They agreed. He said he thought long and hard about a soft word for the defeat of Egypt by Israel. He finally came up with the term, *naksa*, or setback, and made the announcement. He waited nervously for *Nasser's* reaction. He did not have to wait long. *Nasser* used the same term shortly thereafter when he referred to the defeat.

The 1967 *naksa* was exactly that. Egypt was in the middle of executing its long term plans to improve the state of industrialization – with the caveat that the wrong people were running these programs. This left Egypt with less cultivated land because of the Aswan High Dam and no reclaimed land using the dam. Many factories were building parts for larger projects that never saw the light. It was a real abortion for Egypt's industrialization.

Islam was a stranger during the sixties. I witnessed odd events in that decade. While Egypt had executed *Syed Qutb*, a prominent leader of the Brotherhood in 1965, on a charge that he ordered the failed assassination of president *Nasser* years before. Between 1965 and 1967, the mini-skirt became fashionable. At one time, when the micro-skirt appeared on the scene, the public was unhappy about how much of women's thighs were showing in public. The socialist coalition passed a rule that a skirt could not be more than so many centimeters above the knee. Knowing that parliament obeyed the coalition, police officers enforced the proposed law. Once an officer touched a girl's thigh while measuring the height of the skirt and she slapped him. The law never materialized. Ironically, Egypt was measuring immorality. In the sixties, I never saw a woman covered with a hijab (the Muslim head scarf). There may have been women covered with a big black sheet, but this was more cultural than *Islamic*. Nudity crept into Egyptian movies and theatres with no real end in sight. I once read a story that Indonesians had so much respect for Arabs and Arabic that they took their shoes off before they went into a movie theatre showing an Arabic movie, even if this movie had some nudity.

When Israel took *Sinai*, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank, no

Muslim talked about Jerusalem, which was taken as part of the West Bank. Jerusalem, in Muslim history, has been the barometer of belief. When Muslims believed properly, they controlled Jerusalem; when their belief faltered, they lost it. I guess to lose it to Israel, who many Muslims believed in 1967 to be a nation of gangs and bandits, meant that Muslim belief was at its lowest.

As a result of the 1967 war and Egypt's vulnerability to air attacks by American-made bombers, *Nasser* stopped soccer tournaments because they often attracted over one hundred thousand fans to a single game. Soccer was stopped for over two years. The best players left Egypt to play for Saudi and Gulf state teams. This lasted for three years until Egypt and Israel signed the Rogers Plan in 1970. The Rogers Plan was introduced by US Secretary of State William Rogers and was basically a United Nations led resolution to formally cease hostilities. Before the Rogers Plan, Israel bombarded Egypt with hundreds of thousands of tons of bombs in what Egypt termed the War of Attrition. We used to joke and say, "If that was spit, we would have drowned."

Some of those attacks were on Cairo. It was commonplace for American-made Israeli fighter jets to break the sound barrier over Cairo, and with it, the glass of many impoverished homes and occasionally some mud-huts where some villagers dwelled collapsed. Israel attacked a factory once. Another time, planes attacked a school that was in the neighborhood of a factory and may have killed a few students. We used to have evacuation drills for schools and for entire towns. It was not fun. Egypt took the opportunity of the cessation of hostilities to install short- and long-range anti-aircraft missiles, SAM 2 and SAM 3, respectively. These missiles ended the excursions of Israeli planes into Egyptian air space. When I visited Suez in 1978, I saw the damage all the bombardment had done. Most houses had lost many stories or had holes in the floors of a few stories and almost no foundation as the weight of the bomb broke the floors and the explosion destroyed much of the foundation.

Soccer returned the following year, I think. At the time, soccer was more on Egyptians' minds than Jerusalem. *Nasser's* continuous persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood forced them all over the Arab

world. Saudi had welcomed them, despite *Nasser*. In Algeria, *Shaikh Mohammed Ghazali* stirred a religious revolution in the spirits of Algeria. The French annexed Algeria as part of France from 1830 until 1962. It is said that about one million Algerians died fighting the French out of Algeria. The Algerians could not speak Arabic and were not very Muslim-minded. I believe *Ghazali* single-handedly revived their understanding to the true *Islam*.

In Saudi, many of the Brotherhood leaders found great support from the government. However, a conflict arose quickly between the Saudi government and the Brotherhood leaders: namely *bay-aa* (allegiance). The Saudis assumed that by giving the leaders a home, they bought their loyalty, but the Brotherhood was bound by the *bay-aa* to the head of the movement, *Al-Morshid Al'am*. When this loyalty could not be shifted and the wishes of the king meant little to the Brotherhood leaders, the Saudis devised a plan to break their strength. They poured funds into a new form of *Wahhabism: Neo-salafism*. *Salaf* is an ancestor in Arabic. All Muslims believe they learn their *Islam* from the good ancestors, particularly those in the first three centuries of *Islam*. So, by definition, all good Muslims are *Salafis*, followers of the methods of the early ancestors.

Saudi encouraged people to read the *Quran* and the original books of the tradition of Prophet *Mohammed* and not listen to their preachers. New preachers appeared on the scene that promoted this thought process: learn what the ancestors did; follow what you believe is right from what you learnt; do not obey a preacher if you see he is contradicting what you learnt. This seems innocent on the surface, but it has two major flaws: an individual on his own or armed with books needs to be aware of the entire *Quran*, the traditions, and their interpretation before they can start to dwell on the meaning of a particular verse or tradition. The fact that some *Quran* and traditions intentionally supersede each other further complicates this issue. The other issue is the resulting lack of respect for scholars and leaders. This was a clear path to destroy *bay-aa*. From the sixties to the eighties, this was achieved gradually.

In September 1970, King *Hussein ibn Talal* of Jordan was upset with Palestinians and their gradual ascent to control in Jordan. He launched a crackdown against them, in what later became known as Black September. *Nasser* intervened and held mediation talks in Cairo.

This was very stressful, and due to his diabetes, *Nasser* died on September 30, 1970, the same day he brokered a lasting peace between Jordan and the Palestinians. Shortly before his death, *Nasser* forged a federation with Syria under the rule of *Hafez al-Assad*, Sudan under the rule of *Jaafar Numeiri* and Libya, under the rule of a young *Muammar Gaddafi*.

The Sadat Years to the Present

Mohammed Anwar Sadat, an Egyptian with a Sudanese mother, stepped in as a temporary president and was later confirmed in a referendum. *Sadat* inherited a socialist country from *Nasser*. Communism was starting to gain a strong foothold in Egypt. *Sadat* weighed his options and decided it was best to sever ties with the Soviet Union. He told Soviet experts to leave.

He announced that 1971 would be a decisive year in the battle with Israel, although, this was a promise he could not keep. Pakistan lost a war to India that same year. The US could not afford to have a second ally lose another war during the same period. *Sadat* had to wait two more years without any superpower support to have the decisive battle. He also did not see the need for the federation with Syria, Libya, and Sudan.

On October 6, 1973 at 2:00 pm, Egyptian radio and TV broadcasted military music. The announcers' voice read military communiqués, stating Israel had attacked Egypt and Syria and that they would both retaliate. It wasn't long afterward that the television showed images of Egyptian soldiers crossing the Suez Canal. It was a remarkable sight. Not long before, *Mohammed Hasanain Haykal*, the editor of *AlAhram*, the main Egyptian daily newspaper, had written an editorial about how impossible it would have been for Egypt to defeat the Israelis, given Israel's superiority in the air and the Bar Lev line of defense that Israel had set up all along the Suez Canal. The Israelis also had napalm in tanks ready to pour over the canal, in case Egypt ever dared to send its troops over the Canal. This was all unbelievable.

I learnt about the war as I came home from an afternoon of school. It was at the beginning of grade twelve. I found *Ahmed* and his friend Anton Calash sitting in our small living room. They told me war had broken out between Egypt and Israel. I did not believe them and insisted on hearing the radio myself. We listened to the news. It was true. We were shocked because it was Yom Kippur, a Jewish holiday equivalent to New Year's Day. It would have been impossible for Israel to start a war on that day.

The next morning, October 7, 1973, *AlAhrām* published a picture of Egyptian soldiers raising the Egyptian flag over *Sinai*. We knew that nobody could have done anything to get those soldiers out of *Sinai*. We were proud to be Egyptians once again.

Over the next days, we read as much as we could in the papers and watched TV. We listened to international broadcasts from London, the US, and even Israel to try to get a more accurate picture about what was going on. We were surprised to learn the government was telling the truth. One rumor that spread in Egypt was that we had downed planes with the US flag still painted on them. The story said that Israel was badly in need of weapons, so the US set up an air bridge to get all kinds of weapons to Israel. Israel apparently did not have time to paint its flag on the planes. We did not understand the source of this rumor if it was not true. It could have been spread by the Israelis to demoralize the Egyptians, who would have been reluctant to directly fight the US. It also could have been spread by the Egyptians to show how desperate the Israelis were.

The war raged on. Egyptians were skeptic about news of Egyptian victories, given our experience with government lies. Rumors spread that the Egyptian army had arrived at Alarish, a port city in *Sinai* at the border with Gaza. Israel was in a difficult situation. Israel had lost the effectiveness of its air power. In spite of the fact that its air power was much more advanced than in the devastating 1967 war, Israel lost more than a third of its air craft on the first two days of the war because of the advanced SAM missiles Egypt and Syria used. Syria recaptured much of the Golan Heights and could start using artillery to shell the Israelis. Israel had to focus on the Syrian front. To delay the advancing Egyptian army, Israel sent one of its best tank columns. A soldier by the name of

Abdul'Aty made history by discovering the shoulder-carried anti-aircraft missiles (SAM 7) could be used against tanks, which caused the total annihilation of the Israeli tank column. Egypt thus captured the head of this Israeli column, General *Assaf Yaguri*, the top general in the column. This was so moralizing for the Egyptians. It was the first time Egypt had captured such a high level prisoner of war.

Rumors spread about the Israeli army, where once stabilizing the Syrian front, sent its best units to the Egyptian front. Through a miscalculation by the Egyptian army, the Israelis managed to control a bridgehead into the western side of the Suez Canal. There were no Egyptian troops for around one hundred kilometers. Israel advanced well into the region and stopped at the one hundred first kilometers on the road from Suez to Cairo, about eighty kilometers from Cairo. Egypt's first army defended Cairo, but it was said to be an awkward battle, given the proximity to the large civilian population of the city.

To this background, the Egyptian second army was capable of entering Israel from the Mediterranean seashore. The Israeli army was, without any air cover, cutting the supply route to the Egyptian third army in south *Sinai*. Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, arrived in the region and shuttled between Cairo and Tel Aviv to broker a truce.

Kissinger was a genius, in that he sat in a session of the Egyptian parliament on October 16 or so, whereby he witnessed President *Sadat* declare that Egypt had a military option to annihilate the Israeli army using air power and missiles to basically win the war once and for all. But they risked killing Egyptian civilians in villages, civilians the Israeli army was using as human shields. *Sadat* said Kissinger assured him if Egypt accepted the cease-fire, the country would regain *Sinai* peacefully and there would be no more war with Israel. The parliament voted for the cease-fire.

That same evening, Kissinger attended a meeting of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, whereby Prime Minister Golda Meir announced Israel had a military option. It could annihilate the Egyptian third army and hence cripple it's military. Meir concluded that Kissinger had assured her if Israel accepted the cease-fire, they would never have to fight Egypt again. The Knesset also voted for the cease-fire. Negotiations started shortly thereafter for the separation of forces. These were the first direct

negotiations between Egyptians and Israelis. Shortly after that, Egypt attained peace with Israel and the truth was buried in the cease-fire. We will never know whose military claims were correct. I tend to believe *Sadat*. There was a rift between *Sadat* and the head of the military after the cease-fire decision. Israel had no hold on the Egyptian second army, which could have caused havoc in Israel.

The 1973 war restored our faith in ourselves as Egyptians and as Muslims. Stories were told about how Egypt used bridges that were not meant for military purposes to cross the Canal. Engineers working on the bridges would not need to tighten the screws. By the time they positioned the tool in place to begin tightening, they would already be tight. Egyptians believed angels fought alongside the Egyptians. A nameless hero is remembered who, after Egypt captured most of the soldiers in the fortified Bar Lev line – a line across the Suez Canal made of sand dunes and fortified bases housing troops, guns and ammunition, named after an Israeli defense minister that billed it as impenetrable – had to load himself with explosives and jump inside an enemy cannon that fired continuously at the Egyptian positions. He silenced that cannon, and a memorial was erected at the site, which I personally visited in 1983.

Egypt had not released any drafted soldier or officer since the defeat of 1967. This meant some drafted officers were in the army for over eight years, waiting to defeat Israel. My brother, *Adel*, was one of those officers. He was luckier. He joined the army in 1971. This gave me a good opportunity to learn many of the stories almost first-hand, as many of his friends and classmates were officers in the combating Second and Third Armies of Egypt. Stories have it that on the morning of October 6, the commanders summoned the soldiers and asked them, “If we told you our engineers were on the other side since yesterday evening and have blocked the napalm and that we are ready to cross the canal, would you cross in boats?” The answer was a hesitant “yes,” not understanding the full impact of the briefing. At two o’clock in the afternoon, when the order was given to cross, all soldiers jumped on all available boats. This was not planned and caused much of the gap that Israel later used. However, it was our enthusiasm that caused some of our losses. Not bad for a country that had to rely mostly on its own resources to defeat one

of the legendary armies of the world.

My brother, *Adel*, told me these two stories. A couple of teams had to volunteer to move SAM generator sets from *Port Saied* to the front lines. The idea was to drive one of three truckloads through the very front lines at the same time the Israelis were frantically trying to keep the status quo, using every thing they had at their disposal. One of their favorite and most effective weapons was napalm, a forbidden acidic gel that the Americans had developed into a bomb and used in Vietnam. It could burn anything. Volunteers would have two convoys: one was real with all the sets; another was a decoy with just one truck towing others. They drove in pitch-black nights, falling in all kinds of bomb craters, but finally transported all the sets to their advanced positions.

In the second story, an engineer was part of a team that fixed the generator sets for the SAM 2 and 3 anti-aircraft missiles. These were our main and very effective air-defense tools. The team would receive information that a base was hit or damaged; the team went in to repair or replace it. During one of these missions, the team had to do a full change, due to extensive damage. It took a long time. The engineer went for bathroom break, and while in the process, an enemy plane came by and dropped another dose of napalm on the worksite. Two of his colleagues were totally burnt and another one barely survived with major disfiguration.

As an aside, the advances in anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles and the introduction of shoulder-carried missiles like the SAM-7 and Sagger missiles helped restore the value of individual soldiers that had been lost in the 1960s because of advances in planes and armor. I met many Egyptian soldiers who had lived through the War of Attrition who had developed a phobia of Phantom airplanes. This was because when a supersonic plane attacked a soldier or his quarters, the bomb or the shell exploded before one heard the plane. There are no warnings. Soldiers would wake up at night screaming, "Phantom, Phantom." Shoulder-carried missiles ended this phenomenon for the 1970s. Needless to say, the United States scientists went back to the drawing board to improve in radar detection and deception to restore the value of the fighter jet.

Anwar Sadat became very confident. He allowed Muslim groups

to form, in an attempt to end any communist aspirations in Egypt. He pardoned many of *Nasser's* old foes. The Brotherhood returned to Egypt. Though they were not allowed to form a political party; they were allowed to practice their religious activities. This was a very smart move and ended the communist threat. In the university's first student union elections, the Muslim movements were allowed to participate and won by a landslide.

Sadat was not content to be the only leader who defeated the legendary Israeli army in an open war; he wanted to add peace to his achievements. In a surprise 1977 midnight speech, he announced that if Israel would invite him, he would visit Jerusalem to negotiate a lasting peace with the Israelis. This was a bold move not many anticipated. Israel did invite him the following day. It was historic to see an Egyptian president shaking hands with classic foes, including Moshe Dyan, Israel's Defense Minister throughout the 1967 and 1973 wars; Golda Meir, Israeli Prime Minister during the 1973 war; and Menachem Begin, then current Prime Minister. *Sadat* and Begin agreed to negotiate face-to-face with American mediation to settle their conflict. The historic Jerusalem visit was November 7, 1977.

At Camp David, in 1979, US President Jimmy Carter helped broker an agreement that was meant to encompass all Middle Eastern countries to end the conflict. However, other leaders were not as foresighted as *Sadat*. Or maybe in fairness, they were just not ready. They not only rejected the peace accord, they also severed their ties with Egypt and temporarily moved the Arab League's headquarters from Cairo to Tunis, Tunisia. This was an extremely bad calculation from the Arab side. Immediately after the Camp David accord, Israel began to withdraw from *Sinai*, and *Sadat* and Begin jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1979 and 1980, *Sadat* had major problems with the Muslim leaders. He zigzagged between jailing them and releasing them. He apparently had visions of being killed by a soldier in Khaki fatigues. He changed the fatigues in Cairo to dark green.

Sadat carried on with *Nasser's* habit of great military parades, except now focused on October 6. On October 6, 1981, during such a parade, a number of soldiers jumped out of a jeep. *Sadat* stood up to salute them. When they came close enough, they started shooting and

throwing grenades. *Sadat* died from gunshot wounds. Vice President *Hosny Mubarak* witnessed the assassination from a few meters. He became the new president of Egypt.

The peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was rejected by most Arab states, except possibly Jordan. I say possibly because unofficially Jordan had close ties with Israel long before Egypt started its peace initiative with Israel. This Arab rejection of the peace treaty was unfortunate, since the treaty generated sufficient momentum that could have allowed all other problems to be resolved. Of course, we have to acknowledge that *Sadat* was ahead of his time and sentiment in most other Arab countries was still very angry with Zionism and the loss of Palestinian rights.

Israel used the assurance of no-war with Egypt to attack other Arab countries. It had a long crusade into Lebanon that proved catastrophic for Israel from many sides. It started June 5, 1982 as an attempt to remove the Palestinian guerrillas from the Lebanese mountains bordering Israel to eliminate the threat of rockets being fired on Israeli villages in northern Israel. However, once the threat was eliminated, Israel did not demonstrate a willingness to leave Lebanon. Moreover, in removing the Palestinian Liberation Organization's top executives including its head, *Yasser Arafat*, from Beirut, the Israeli army watched idly, at best, as Lebanese Christian militia went house to house in two Palestinian refugee camps and killed over one thousand men. Many believe that Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister of the 2000s was responsible for this massacre. This event and others angered the Lebanese people, who began suicide-bombing attacks against the Israeli army and other foreign troops that were supposed to monitor the peace but were perceived to be pro-Israel.

The suicide bombings forced the US to leave Lebanon in spite of statements by the US President Reagan that they were not leaving. The US got involved in the fighting, and more than once bombarded districts in Beirut with heavy artillery from ships in the Mediterranean. Once the US was out of Lebanon, the Lebanese focused their attacks on the Israeli army. *Shiite* groups, such as *Amal* and *Hizbollah* (the Party of *Allah*) formed and took matters into their own hands. These groups were bolder and started regularly attacking the Israeli army. This led to a staggered retreat from Lebanon to successive lines arbitrarily defined by Israel.

By 2005, Israel had left all of Lebanon, except for farms that Israel claims are part of Syria. This is actually almost a funny argument: even if they are part of Syria, what is Israel doing there?

Why I said that Israel's excursion into Lebanon was catastrophic is that Israel was forced to leave Lebanon without any agreement with the Lebanese. In most military circles, this is tantamount to defeat and retreat. Israel was starting to shrink. The Arabs feared Israel would continue to expand until the dream of a Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates was realized. By 1985, most intellectual Arabs were starting to understand that the dream of Greater Israel is similar to the American Dream: they happen while you are asleep. The shrinking of Israel is irreversible.

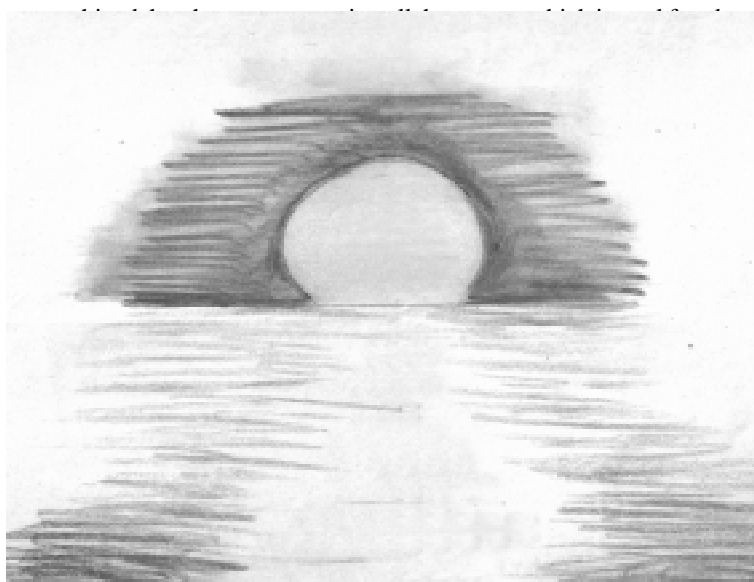
Israel and the Palestinians engaged in repeated attempts at a peace treaty. The biggest success was in Oslo, Norway. The Oslo Accord saw a promise of the establishment of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank. Shortly after it was signed, Israel handed over two or three symbolic towns to the Palestinian authority that was headed by *Yasser Arafat*, whom the people elected as president. However, *Arafat* had virtually no control over the people and given the heavy presence of the Israeli army in Gaza and the West Bank, confrontations happened and suicide bombings were imported to Palestine. Israel retaliated heavily against these bombings and blamed *Arafat* for not controlling his people. It was a situation best explained by a statement attributed to *Arafat*, "I cannot flush my toilet without the permission of Israel; how do they expect me to control anybody?"

The Palestinian people rose up twice in popular uprising (*Intifada*) against the Israeli occupation. It was these uprisings, more than any threat by the PLO in the past that forced Israel to make more concessions, whereby Israel showed willingness to return Palestinian land in exchange for peace. During the first *Intifada*, Israeli Prime Minister *Yehud Barak* met with *Arafat* at Camp David, Maine, hosted by President Bill Clinton during his last days in office. Clinton wanted to leave a legacy of peace in the Holy Lands. However, the rush, combined with Israel's desire to keep all the strategic land of the West Bank, caused the negotiations to fail.

The failure of the peace negotiations cost *Barak* his prime minister position. Sharon, who was leading the Israeli army during the massacre

of the Palestinian refugees, became prime minister. Sharon started in office by being very tough against the Palestinians, promising no concessions and affirmed this by starting to build a wall surrounding the Palestinian villages and towns in the West Bank. He called it a security wall, but it is reminiscent of the Berlin Wall. The Palestinians took the matter to the International Court in The Hague. The court ruled that the wall broke international law and ordered Israel to stop the construction. Israel, as a matter of habit with UN resolutions, continued to build the wall.

In August 2005, while I was visiting Israel, Sharon executed a plan that he had developed to unilaterally withdraw out of Gaza. He forced Israelis out of settlements. By all international law, the settlers had no right to be there, but according to Jewish scriptures, the Israelis are forbidden from removing their citizens from their homes. It was an interesting dilemma that Sharon faced but he executed his plan. Sharon was bitterly opposed by many in the conservative Likud block that he headed. In November 2005, he decided to abandon Likud, which he helped form, and started a new centrist party in Israel to further his plan to evacuate Palestinian lands in exchange for peace. Whilst in Jerusalem on August 20, I gave a talk in *Al-Aqsa* mosque, where I reminded the listeners to think positive about the events that were happening. I



was a move in the right direction.

Back in Egypt, *Moubarak* cracked down on Muslim leaders and regularly jailed and tortured them. *Essam Al'aryan*, one of the top leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, has been jailed for long periods.

Development of Neo-Salafism

Regarding *Saddam Hussein's* adventures into Iran (in 1980) and Kuwait (in 1990), it was the latter that led to the first Gulf War in 1991 and the ensuing embargo on Iraq that basically strangled the Iraqi people. And whilst the attention of the world was on Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction theatrics, parliamentary elections were taking place in Algeria.

Algeria had a French system of government, where the elections were done in two rounds. To everyone's surprise, in 1992, Muslim parties won more than eighty percent of the seats in the first round. This excited all Muslims everywhere. It showed that Muslims did not need to be militant; if they join the democratic process, they could eventually come to power.

The Algerian army had a different plan. Before the second round, they cancelled the elections and took control of the government. Not one western country raised a voice of concern about the suspension of democracy in Algeria. The US even seemed to be blessing the army's move. The suspension of the elections led to bloodshed in Algeria with some of the Muslim party's members turning militant. Of course, some people ask: what else could they have done?

We come back to the *Neo-Salafis*. Saudi would have been happy if the matter stopped at successfully combating the concept of *bay-aa* to other than the king. However, once they introduced self-proclaimed scholars daring to invalidate the opinions of other scholars, basically monopolizing the religion, this cancer grew to feed on itself and its master.

Once the Brotherhood was practically eliminated from Saudi, the *Neo-Salafis* turned against each other. Their *fatwas* began to focus on declaring each other heretics.

Osama bin Laden is a product of the *Neo-Salafi* movement: a self-declared scholar who saw fit to issue Muslim decrees that he believed obligated all Muslims, when not many Muslims knew or understood the degree of his sophistication in understanding *Islam*. He grew frustrated with the American's continuous support of Israel, its continued interference in Muslim affairs, and its presence on Saudi soil, so he declared war on the US and its allies.

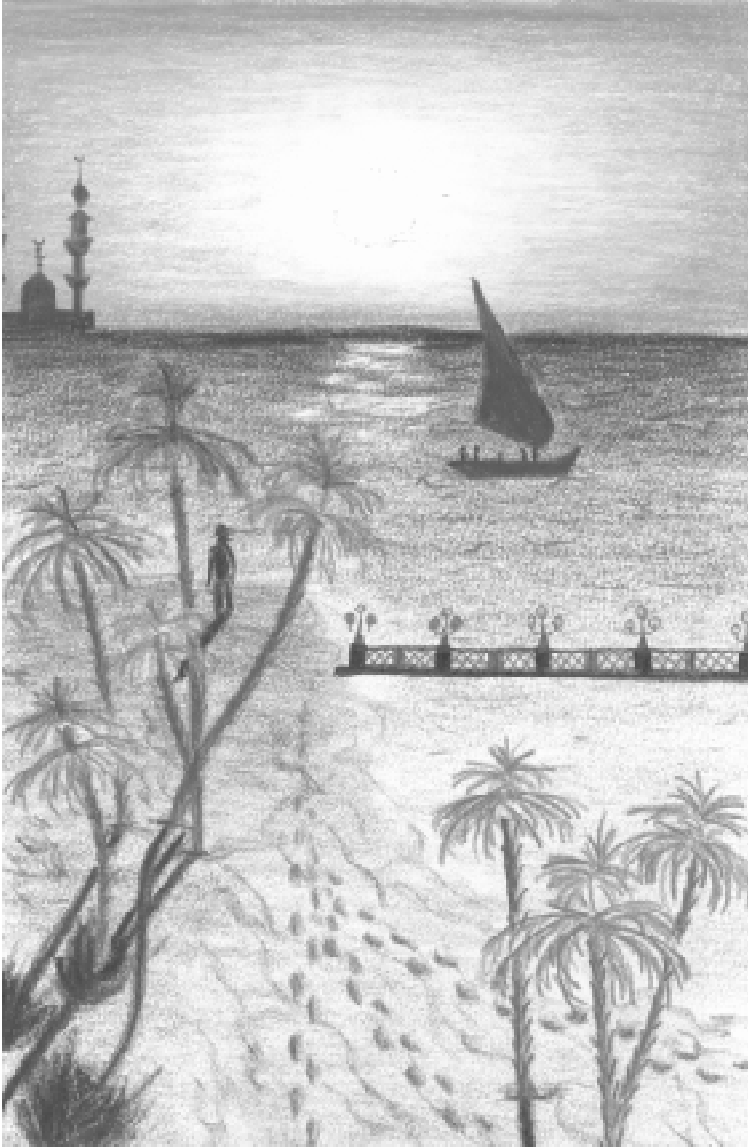
Things were not always hostile between *bin Laden* and the US. Originally, he was a close friend of the Americans when he was almost in charge of foreign recruits joining the Afghani *Mujahideen*. However, as the Afghanis beat the Soviet Union, the US lost interest in supporting the *Mujahideen*, and chaos prevailed in Afghanistan, *bin Laden* went home, where he became very vocal against the US presence in Saudi for the first Gulf War against Iraq. This made him unpopular with the Saudi government, in fact, so unpopular, they asked him to leave. He moved to Sudan with a group of the Afghani Arabs. Meanwhile, the Saudi government stripped him of his Saudi nationality.

Osama bin Laden worked on a number of large civil projects in Sudan and built the network of supporters that is often referred to as *Al-Qaeda* (the base). His statements and activities eventually made the Sudanese government ask him to leave. He moved back to Afghanistan and associated with the *Taliban*, a group of *Salafis* who had garnished control over Afghanistan. *Osama bin Laden's* rhetoric against the Americans grew louder and bolder. He declared war against the US and its interests. The US put *bin Laden* on its most wanted list and discussed assassinating him numerous times.

It is impossible for an observer to ascertain fact from fiction when it comes to *Al-Qaeda*. The US has taken the role of the victim, the police, judge, and executioner in all matters relating to *Al-Qaeda*. The Bush administration (elected in November 2000 and 2004) appeared to have deemed it unpatriotic to question any of the conclusions that the government had rushed into. In any case, *Al-Qaeda* was accused of masterminding and/or executing a number of terrorist acts against the

US, including the bombing of two African US embassies, the attack on the USS Cole in the sea of Yemen, and of course, the attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Many other global terrorist acts are blamed on *Al-Qaeda*: the Madrid train bombing in 2004; the nightclub bombing in Indonesia; the attacks in Casablanca, Morocco; the attacks on *Sharm-el-Shaikh* and Taba in



Egypt; and numerous attacks in Saudi Arabia. The only problem with these accusations is no one has ever claimed responsibility for these attacks. And rarely did anyone go on proper trial with witnesses and evidence – to be scrutinized by a good team of defense lawyers. I am not saying this to try to acquit *Al-Qaeda*, but rather as a matter of historical accuracy.

Shaikh Munir

A friend of mine, who was a few years older than myself, used to pray a lot in the mosque. Everyone called him *Shaikh*, for all the signs of purity and holiness that he showed. People asked him to call the Azan, the Muslim call for prayers, as they all believed he was blessed. His name was *Munir*.

Munir always needed my help in school to translate and explain English literature. It was a pleasure to help such a holy person. It used to hurt me when he called my place when I was away, and I was truly embarrassed when he met my German girlfriend. As years went on and we were both in the final year of our respective degrees, I was so busy; we had to meet for the private lessons long past midnight.

Months passed. We both graduated and were working when we met again by accident. We talked about everything and naturally about marriage and its financial costs. We both were classified under low income. He admitted marriage had become very difficult for Egyptian men. “How can a man be sure of the purity of the girl he chooses?” I immediately replied, “Good girls for good boys – and you are good. You should not fear anything. Life must have saved a pure girl for you, *Shaikh Munir*.” He replied, “One has seen strange things: a girl would claim purity until I invited her to my place to explain a few problems, then she ignores all those false ideas and starts taking her clothes off and ... you are a man of the world. You know what goes on.” I interrupted, “I never did that myself! You mean university girls came to study with you, and you slept with them?” He replied, “Oh no, I never slept with them. We were only warming up.” I asked, “What about all that praying?” He

said, “Of course, after the girl leaves, only regret remains. Regret pushed me to the mosque all the time, and God forgives.” I can’t recall the rest of our chat. I was shocked.

Whenever I met him after that, I asked about the news of warming up. He never wanted to talk about it. He replied, “Shame on you. It is *Ramadan*” or “Shhh, I just came out of the mosque.”

The Muslim Experience

The *Quran* is divided into verses that grouped together form a *sura*. *Suras* vary in length. Some are almost three hundred verses long; some are as short as three verses. Some verses tell stories about nations that were before the time of *Mohammed*. The *Quran* mentions twenty-five prophets by name. Their stories differ in detail and frequency. The prophet whose story is mentioned most is Moses.

Most of the stories agree with the Old Testament, except for some details. The *Quran* has many commandments that start from a list incorporating the Ten Commandments of Moses. But they go on to include many other rules and regulations. The *Quran* prophesized events that were to happen during the life of *Mohammed* and afterwards.

Muslims have to believe the *Quran* is a perfect complete book. In its completeness, it states that whatever *Mohammed* has instructed us to do, we should do. Whatever he told us to stay away from, we are to stay away from. This statement included the teachings of *Mohammed* as an inseparable part of the rules of the *Quran*. A true Muslim obeys all *Mohammed*’s commandments plus those of the *Quran*.

Islam became more interesting in the late seventies and early eighties. I had a sound Muslim upbringing with my mom. I always prayed and never missed a prayer since I was eight. I may not have always been sincere, but I always prayed the five daily prayers. I read one chapter from the *Quran* every Friday since I was twelve. I memorized that chapter by the time I was fifteen. I read selected interpretations of the *Quran* and was, by mid-1983, totally comfortable with the *Quran*. I was not

totally comfortable with the authority of the sayings of Prophet *Mohammed*. I doubted the authenticity of those recorded sayings, especially those that appeared not to make sense to me.

It must have been 1977. I sat in a classroom, and my life long friend, *Sisso El Hamamsy*, asked me if I knew that Cat Stevens was in Cairo. He sang such great songs as “Father and Son” and many others. I replied, “No.” *Sisso* said an immigration officer told a mutual friend he processed a gentleman by the name Cat Stevens and he was staying at a hotel in Cairo. Our friend went diligently to the named hotel and found the room Cat Stevens was staying in. He knocked but got no answer. He waited in front of the door, wondering what to do. A hotel worker asked what he was looking for. He replied, “I am looking for the guest staying in this room.” The worker replied, “The *Shaikh*?” meaning, “The Holy Man?” Our friend was puzzled, “I know he has a beard; but he is definitely not a *Shaikh*!” They were arguing when Cat Stevens returned in proper a Muslim cloak (a long white *jilbab* with Afghan pants under it). He invited our friend into his room and told him the whole story about his conversion to *Islam*.

Sisso and I were amazed about this conversion, since we had witnessed the religious journey of Cat Stevens from the covers of his albums. One had Buddhist intonations. We carefully analyzed his most recently published album and discovered Arabic words that could be translated as “In the Name of *Allah*, the Beneficent, the Merciful” written on it.

We had been following the stellar career of Cassius Clay and how he had beaten legends of his time. We learnt of rumors he converted to *Islam* and changed his name to *Mohammed Ali*. This gave us special pride since *Mohammed Ali* was the founder of modern Egypt. We then saw pictures of *Mohammed Ali* in *Ihram* (the cloth a Muslim pilgrim covers himself with) in an Egyptian paper. We also learnt of a brief visit to Cairo and the pyramids apparently on his way back from the pilgrimage. I seem to recall one or two exhibition fights. We then followed all his fights faithfully.

The point of these two stories is that converts to *Islam* often discover *Islam* at the peak of their career. In 1983, when I hackled in the Hyde Park, I learnt about “Born-Again Christians.” I talked seriously to a lot of them. They all discovered God at the bottom of their life. Meaning,

one could be in jail and see the light and so on.

Muslims believe all humans are born Muslim, that *Islam* is the religion of instinct. A child then is made Christian through baptism or Jewish through the Bar (or Bat) Mitzvah. When a person of another faith becomes a Muslim, we do not call it conversion but rather reversion, since they are returning to their original religion.

I had begun to reaffirm my *Islam*. Serendipity played a big role. Being bored in the cold (literally and metaphorically) German north, I turned to the *Quran*. By 1983, I had read the entire *Quran* about four or five times. I read it enough to start facing the biggest issue I had with it. This was a simple one but fatal for an engineer used to explaining everything: long biblical stories in the *Quran* were told in segments in different chapters. If the *Quran* is God's literal word, why was the dialogue not identical in the different segments? To my knowledge, only the story of Yusuf (Joseph) was told in its entirety in a single chapter. This was fatal for me because I began to conclude for myself that if the *Quran* was God's literal word, it must be perfectly accurate and precise.

I had to answer this question for myself. I took the first story in the *Quran*, that of Adam and Eve, and took note of each time it was mentioned. I put the collection of verses on a few sheets of paper so I could see them at the same time. I put the related dialogues beside each other and was amazed by the result. The dialogue complimented each other. If the words were not originally Arabic, it may need more than one Arabic word to convey the meaning of a single word. It would become boring if ten words were used to explain every term in the original dialogue. Instead, *Allah*, in his ultimate wisdom, did not want to bore us and spread the dialogue in many places with slightly different wordings. When one overlays these dialogues, one gets a clearer message. Further, the stories would be very boring when combined and the lessons learnt from them would be minimized. Of course, *Allah* was able to put the stories together and make them interesting, but it was a lesson to us: be brief and deliver one message at a time.

I learnt a lesson from the story of Adam and Eve that I never heard any scholar mention before. Adam was a prophet. He lived with his wife in paradise. He had only one infraction to commit: to approach the forbidden tree. He committed this one infraction. We should never assume that we are perfect. We should always assume we make mistakes. We

should try to do our best but know that we always make mistakes. The best way out of these mistakes is to truly apologize and keep trying to do better. The realization that I found a moral for a *Quranic* story on my own was eye-opening. The *Quran* finally spoke to me personally. This experience inaugurated a personal relationship between the *Quran* and me.

Once I removed this internal issue I had with the *Quran*, I began understanding other issues. Why do we not love God like we love our lovers? When a boy loves a girl, he does everything he could for her, gladly. If the degrees of love are: hate, dislike, not care, care, like, love, adore, and worship, then worship is total love with complete submission. Why is it that believers suffer in their worshipping of their Lord? I understood they suffer because they do not worship. True worship means a believer never suffers. A true believer only gets joy from his belief.

I had another revelation when I read the *Quran* for the first time with concentration: I understood it. Before that, the classical Arabic of the *Quran* felt like a foreign language. During the readings with concentration, I realized few words are uncommon to me but rather most are quite clear.

This research taught me the *Quran* must be understood in whole, not in parts. Verses of the *Quran* often explain each other.

I later learnt why the story of Joseph was narrated in one segment. It had all the elements for a modern bestseller: rags to riches, a slave who became king, sibling rivalry, and seduction. When anyone starts reading this story, he cannot put it down.

I arrived in Germany in July 1983. It was *Ramadan* and I stayed at an inn in Salem, a village in Southern Germany close to Uberlingen by the lake. I traveled to Amsterdam and The Hague. I applied for a visa to Yugoslavia, India, and Iran and received all but Iran's. My plan was to drive to Afghanistan to learn about the Iraq-Iran conflict first-hand. I did not need any other visa. Iran told me that given that I am Egyptian, I could not get the visa. Apparently, there were two million Egyptians in Iraq. Some were fighting in the Iraqi army. I could see their point of view but still filed an appeal. I explained I wanted to know the truth myself. They told me the appeal could take up to three months.

I had a great time in The Hague. I wrote more of my thoughts and

wanted to improve my drawing skills. I befriended a fourteen-year-old, mature Dutch boy, who shared some of his drawings and helped me kill lots of time. I once called him at home and realized his mother was worried we had some form of a physical relationship. I explained to her I was really just drifting and absolutely had no interest in any physical relationship with members of the same sex. She was relieved. I had to ask him whether he, too, stared at the breasts of girls who were sun-tanning topless on the beaches. He said, "Yes but cautiously." He told me about orgy parties he had been to and how he could wake up not knowing whose body part was on top of whom. It was all news to me.

My family was getting worried I would be killed in action in Afghanistan or something. My brother *Ahmed*, who was then living in Calgary with his wife, called me and invited me to wait the rest of the three months with him in Canada. I thought this would be a great idea. I bought a ticket from an agency in Ijmuiden, Holland, because there was an agent with the most beautiful eyes I had ever seen. I set a realistic date for the travel that gave me sufficient time to get a visa. I bought a two-way ticket direct from Frankfurt to Calgary.

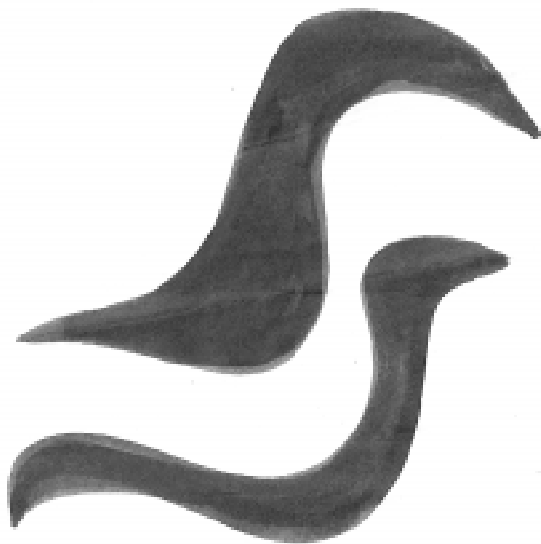
My father asked me to stay with him indefinitely in London. I did not plan on it but went to visit him anyway. We had a great time together. I really got to know him. I told him honestly that I felt he did not contribute to my upbringing, but that he was my father and I loved him nevertheless. He replied, "I married a wonderful lady that could take care of you all alone." I thanked him for my mom. He often walked with me to the Speakers' Corner in the Hyde Park in London (Speakers' Corner attracts people from all walks of life to listen, participate, and even heckle opinions and topics in a free assembly, usually every Sunday), but he would not stay to watch me join a band of hecklers who spent the afternoon intelligently disrupting speakers, while getting a few laughs in the process. We were a bunch of stand-up comics trying to steal the show. My specialty was disrupting the spiritual speakers. I guess I was revenging from Paul who had embarrassed me a few years earlier. I had visited his circle in 1976 with a girl I knew after I had shortly visited a larger circle. When I got to his circle, Paul stopped reading from the book he was holding and stared at me. He asked me why I had gone to the other circle first. I replied, "Because it was bigger." He told me that

was not a good enough reason and he refused to read till I left. After a few awkward minutes, I left.

My father told me that since I was not married, he would be willing to take care of me while I earned a Ph.D. in a new field he felt was very promising: computer animation. I thought little of the idea and did not like it. Cartoons bored me by then. My father encouraged me to apply for the Canadian visa. I successfully applied for a tourist visa.

In my spare time, I read a lot of philosophy and physics books. I had books on relativity and the “Tao of Physics.” I was deeply in love with particle physics and considered studying it. I was fascinated by the concept that, in particle physics, some of the tracks elementary particles leave in laboratory experiments need either the existence of anti-particles or that particles travel backwards in time.

Journeying to Frankfurt, I had begun to see the analogy between religion and physics. Well, this is the whole point of the book “Tao of Physics.” In physics, we believe in elementary particles though we will never see them. We know that elementary particles exist because of their interaction with other matter we can see, such as their tracks in bubble chambers. In religion, we believe in God, even though we do not see Him. We know He exists because we see the result of His work all around



The Tree

Adam lost his paradise because of it
Why did you repeat?
Just for knowledge!
How does it feel to sin?
To be out of the mercy
Of the one you love?

Now the tree is empty
All its leaves are gone
How does it feel?
To have loved a tree that dries?

God still forgave Adam
Gave him another chance
He told him "Go down there
"Get hungry, and thirsty

"Get hungry,
But if you still remember me
"If you still love me
"You will find your way back to paradise."

So,
Don't lose hope
Your sin might be forgiven
Try to find a tree
That blooms all around the year

us. I was starting to realize that the reason people have a more difficult time accepting God than physics is that in physics, experimentation does not involve one's own self. Religion requires one to experiment with him or her self.

A Trader in My Life

My aunt had a habit of inviting certain groups of people to visit on certain weeknights. The interesting people included my brother, who was emotionally involved with one of my aunt's four daughters (and eventually married her). My aunt's husband knew a used merchandise trader. He was reputed to know the unknown.

I only visited my aunt three or four times in my life, but my brother wanted me with him one Thursday night. It was the only time I wore the national Egyptian dress, a *galabiyya*, in real public in Egypt. As soon as I walked into the living room, which faced the front door of the apartment, I was greeted by a voice, "Welcome to the greatest *Zaghloul* that ever lived." This was the trader's voice. They immediately asked him, "Greater than *Sa'ad Zaghloul*?" *Sa'ad* was the man who led the 1919 revolt against the British in Egypt and became the first prime minister of Egypt. The trader responded, "Far greater." I then thought to myself this flattery would not get this trader anywhere. He told everybody to make room and let me sit beside him. I did. He put his palm around my knee and grasped it. This did not mean we were gay. It was just a sign of endearment that Egyptian men and women were more comfortable showing towards each other. He began telling life stories about people. I lost interest and, as I always do in meetings where I lose interest, I was lost in thought. I was found when he squeezed my knee. I listened to his story.

He spoke about a person going home, a man, to be specific. This man carried a newspaper, a watermelon, or a school bag; it might have been a school bag, since it may have been a student. This student rushed

home. He needed to urinate from the time he left school, which was an hour prior. He held it in during the bus ride, and now he was three hundred yards from home. He could not hold it any longer and had an accident. He wet his pants; but he was smart. He pretended nothing had happened and covered the wetness with his school bag, went home, and cleaned himself. The trader squeezed my knee hardest when he said, “and he has an accident.” By this time, I was sweating. This happened to me and was practically the only secret I had. No one, other than God and me, knew.

The trader went on to tell other stories, in what seemed to be an attempt not to embarrass me. It was obvious no one else knew he directed that particular story at me. When he finished a number of other stories, he said, “Did you know the moral of that story?” I replied, “No.” He



My Getaway

**My getaway
To the unknown
Don't set
It is too early**

**Give me a chance
To get away
On your golden rays
Away**

**There
Where light is
And always will be
Where love shines
Constantly**

quickly volunteered, “Your dreams are hardest to hold on to when they are closest.”

Religious Experimentation

I joined the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC) or the Rosicrucians. It was an organization with mysterious origins that trained you to control your life and your surroundings. It taught me to guess the time without wearing a watch. It taught me how to focus my awareness in different parts of my body. It was fascinating. When I was supposed to move a pencil without touching it, I got nervous. I knew I would be able to do it but worried I did not know who was really doing it. I lost interest in the organization after that. My membership lasted from the beginning of 1983 until 1985.

I always had a fascination with mysticism. I noticed an ad in a magazine for a book, “The Mystic Masters,” and ordered it. It explained how all prophets and other great characters were masters of other humans and of their own destiny. The book pointed me to the Rosicrucians. I was intrigued by the potential of attaining cosmic consciousness, increasing the used portion of my brain, and controlling my environment. I was also willing to experiment. I had always said I am willing to try everything once; well almost everything. I always excluded sleeping with another man from my list of experimentations.

In my Rosicrucian studies, the most fascinating topics were philosophical monologues about the relationship between man and God. As I learnt more about these issues, I was more interested in the source of the information: from where did the Rosicrucians get their information? Again, serendipity played a role. I was checking out books from the philosophy section of the Library Tower at the University of Calgary in 1984, when I stumbled across a stash of Arabic books. One of these books was one I had always heard of but never read. It was titled, “The

Revival of the Sciences of Religion” by the famous Imam *Ghazali*. I leafed through the first volume and was shocked to find, what I thought to be, a verbatim translation of the most profound Rosicrucian sayings. I finally found a Muslim author that spoke to me. I borrowed the first volume and read much of it within days. This sealed my comfort with *Islam*. All the good things I had ever read were presented to me in a coherent Muslim context, in a form I was totally comfortable with.

One of the issues *Ghazali* explained is the nature of astrology. *Islam* generally states that astrologers are wrong, even if they are accidentally correct. This made me uncomfortable, since in 1982, I studied how to make astrological charts and found them to be revealing about an individual’s character. I did not go into future telling. I felt it contradicted my *Islamic* beliefs. *Ghazali* said that astrology is inherently an incomplete science, meaning stars and planets do influence our nature and our actions. But we do not know all the stars and planets. We will never be able to reliably predict the future using astrology. He did confirm that the birth sign, together with the ascending sign, foretold about a person’s character. This was the last straw in my resistance to *Islam*. *Islam* had, by then, explained everything I knew perfectly.

It would not be fair if I didn’t mention that in 1974, I had read Arabic versions of the New Testament, including specific messaging to Muslims, suggesting where in the *Quran* trinity is confirmed. These were manipulations of words and punctuations that I could see through on my own. However, I loved a lot of what Jesus had said. In 1975, I read Barnabas’ Bible. This is supposedly an original testament by a disciple that confirms the Muslim beliefs about *Al-Maseeh Esa* (Jesus the Messiah) the Son of Mariam (Mary). I loved it and wanted to believe it was the only correct New Testament, but when I read the Christian commentaries on it, I accepted it was probably not original.

I enjoyed the book, “Zen Flesh, Zen Bones.” I also read most of “The Sound of the One Hand,” “The I-Ching,” and “The Bagavaghita.” I loved Zen and Buddhism. I actually agreed with much of what I read in their books. I also discovered a great distance between my understanding

of the world and the Hindu understanding of life.

The University of Calgary

I undertook the Masters of Science degree in January 1984. It was a thesis-based degree, where I was to do six half courses and write a thesis and go through an oral examination of it. To cut a long story short, I registered for ten half courses and scored six As, two A-s and two A+s for an average of an A for all ten. The record, for an MSc, is that I took them all in one semester.

I originally wanted to study under Dr. Chatterjee, who taught me Quantum Mechanics, and waited outside his office when a post-doctoral fellow took me to Dr. Harvey Buckmaster's office. In the final examination, Dr. Chatterjee had a question, "What is Zitterbewegung?" I knew German and wrote: Oscillatory Motion. Others tried to explain the quantum mechanical use of the expression and wrote two page derivations of equations. He gave me the only full mark.

I had lots of fun in all courses. The most interesting was philosophy of science. It opened my eyes to systematic studying of philosophy. I had always considered that I had philosophical leanings, but until 1984, I never knew what that meant. I read a lot of books by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and others, trying to catch up with the rest of the class. It was also interesting because most of the other students were majoring in philosophy and treated science with respect. I was majoring in science and was, naturally, treating philosophy with more respect. It made for many interesting arguments. I once told the professor that we could not teach philosophy by the clock. How could an argument stop just because the bell rang? He agreed and invited us to his beautiful home for an evening of arguments. It was while I did research for this course that I found the book "Revival of the Sciences of Religion" by *Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali* in the University of Calgary library.

I understood for the first time that Kant, one of Europe's greatest philosophers, studied a number of concepts: does man have a free will? Is there absolute right and wrong? This was interesting. Both questions are well studied in *Islam*. We learnt to be comfortable with the answer in a religious studies course in grade nine or so. I built my own theory about Nietzsche. I did not think he died as a crazy man. It is said he saw a man beating a donkey to death up a hill. Nietzsche sat beside the dead donkey crying and never talked after that. I thought that given Nietzsche thought he was ahead of his time, as his introduction to the Anti-Christ book suggests, he felt he was better off abandoning writing and talking after witnessing such a violent act.

During this term, I met a number of interesting people, including Orla Aaquist. Orla was a tad older than me, and I was a tad older than the rest of the students. Orla took two physics courses with me. We became close friends. This was interesting because Orla was a self-proclaimed atheist. I liked to think of myself as a devout Muslim. We had many interesting discussions on the subject. I guess whether atheist or Muslim, we had a lot in common: our love for girls, physics, philosophy, and girls. We used to have our coffee breaks together and often sat in the sun in front of the Science B building. I was sharing an office on the first floor and Orla was sharing one on the fifth. On the sixth floor, *Qasim Syed* had his office. *Qasim* was another devout Muslim with whom I had a lot to do later on.

I also met interesting undergraduate students. One of the most interesting was Don Baird; he was a mature student who caught my attention when he wrote in his analysis of a physics' experiment, "I do not know what the value of the statistical analysis you want me to do with three measurements is; three is nothing but a fart in the world of statistics." Right he was. Don took me canoeing that summer, in what started out as a pleasant trip down Milk River in Southern Alberta. The canoe ended up getting a hole or two after it scraped the bottom in shallow waters. I had to chew a lot of gum trying to patch them. The first evening canoeing, we noticed a nice farm and decided to camp. We set our tents when the farmer came to check what we were doing. He told us it was okay to camp there then told us that we were lucky. He did not think anyone would canoe in April; there was barbed wire stretched across the river that we could not see in the dark.

We carried the canoe for a good part of the trip across ancient burial grounds. My canoeing partner and I missed visiting Writing-on-Stone, the native Indians old writings in caves that the rest of the group visited, which was the whole point of choosing Milk River for the trip.

The analysis and the theoretical work for the Masters of Science thesis was completed by November 1984. Dr. Buckmaster guided me in summarizing the results into a paper that we published by the following April. I was very pleased with myself at the speed with which I had done the work. I do not recall when I had my examination, but I missed the November graduation and graduated in June 1985. I registered for a Ph.D., starting May 1985. We were never clear on the subject of the Ph.D. We applied for various grants and scholarships, and every second year, the subject would be different. Originally, I wanted to study phase transitions in crystals. However, I had a problem with the theoretical work. Dr. Buckmaster and I disagreed on the exact nature of these transitions.

In the summer of 1985, Don Baird convinced me white water rafting was better than canoeing. I originally declined, recalling what happened the year before – that I carried the canoe more than it carried me. However, Don assured me I would be in his raft and would make sure I had fun. We went to the Columbia River in British Columbia. The first day went well with lots of fun. The second day, we were supposed to stop after a horseshoe bend in the river. Don navigated from the back. I sat on a side in the front paddling. A while before the horseshoe, the water moved fast and the raft was turbulent. Someone's paddle fell inside the raft close to me. I reached down to get it and fell inside the raft. The bottom broke off. I was inside the raft holding to the front for dear life with only my head above the water. I was sometimes running on the bottom, but mostly, I was floating. Everybody was shouting at me, "You idiot! Get out of there! Climb on the side! Paddle!" I was worried that we could hit a boulder in the water and that would be the end of me. I was shouting back, "The bottom of the raft is gone." I do not know if they heard me, but someone reached in trying to pull me out when he fell in. I guess the weight of the two of us and the drag slowed the raft enough that we managed to steer it to the shore just by the horseshoe. I survived my second encounter with nature.

In September 1985, when the fall semester commenced, I was

having lunch in my office with Dr. Buckmaster. Orla came to visit with his lunch in his hand and insisted we go and eat outside. Dr. Buckmaster objected saying, “What will you get outside that you will not get here?” I jokingly replied, “A naked girl.” Orla and I went and sat on concrete stairs outside the Science B building where our offices were. Within fifteen minutes, a procession passed right by us. It was a group of boys surrounding and following a naked girl with long hair riding a white horse. Orla explained to me it was the Lady Godiva procession arranged by the engineering students. I do not recall seeing much of her body; she had really long hair. However, I did have a story to tell Dr. Buckmaster when we went back in. That procession was stopped a year or two later, after people complained it was degrading to girls.

In the fall of 1985, after my first child was born, I realized I needed a larger steady income. I applied for jobs and scholarships with the Canadian federal government and one with the University of Calgary. In 1986, I won both the National Science and Engineering Research Center (NSERC) full graduate scholarship and the top scholarship at the university: the Killam scholarship. This was a rare honor.

My brother, *Essam*, used his oilfield connections to get me an interview with an oil well logging company in Calgary. I landed a job in Lloydminster, on the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan, and worked from January 1986 to April 1986. We had a frank discussion and the company needed to downsize; with my scholarships guaranteeing me a good income, I agreed to leave the company. I had put the Ph.D. on part time during that period.

During my time in Lloydminster, I studied more on the electromagnetic phenomena that leads to waves with parallel electric and magnetic fields and came across force-free magnetic fields. This is another interesting subject. We know that moving charges (current) produce a magnetic field. We can then imagine a star, like our sun, has a lot of electric charges moving around at large speeds thus generating a large magnetic field. Ordinarily, this field should interact with other charges and produce a force on them that should cause the star to implode. This does not happen. The explanation is the moving charges move in such a way that they generate magnetic fields that are ultimately parallel to the motion of the charges and thus produce no net force on the charges. The relationship between the two subjects is that most of the time the

charges move parallel to the electric field.

When I returned to Calgary, Oscar Barajas was beginning his MSc work. He and I became close friends and ended up playing soccer together on the Loose Screws. The Loose Screws were almost exactly that. We started in 1985 as a mediocre team but eventually made it to the final game in a Cinderella story but lost. It was fun. Oscar and I collaborated on a lengthy paper on the subject of force-free magnetic fields since we found the first solution for a sphere with force-free magnetic fields. We did not know at the time, but this solution was applicable to Spheromaks, which are spherical fusion nuclear reactors that contain plasma. The solutions known before were for rings known as Tokamaks. Rings hold less material than spheres and never generate more energy than they consume. I have not checked if our solutions were used to advance the subject of power generation from fusion nuclear energy. Some scientists did reference them.

I had spent almost two years of my Ph.D. working on theoretical electromagnetics and had not advanced much on any measurements. I started to build a new device to do absorption and dispersion measurements of different materials. I used the device to measure the characteristics of human hair. We measured the difference between the three colors of hair: black, red, and yellow. To this point, no one had been able to detect all three. I learnt through these measurements that blonde and brown are only shades of black. We could tell from the measurements what a gray hair's original color was. We could tell the intensity of the color. Right in the middle of these experiments, Chernobyl nuclear disaster happened in the Ukraine. Dr. Buckmaster had the brilliant idea of trying to measure the amount of radiation people were subjected to from their hair. To do this, we needed to establish a reference. We radiated some of the hair. We did not notice much. We increased the dose appreciably and saw noticeable changes. We were very pleased but after weeks of analysis, we noticed the glass containing the hair grew dark with the radiation. We radiated a tube on its own and got the same results we had with the hair. We concluded that the glass introduced the change. We abandoned the work. A few months later, we learnt someone else used hair in the same way to determine the amount of radiation some of the Chernobyl victims were subjected to. We had reached a premature conclusion. Both the glass and the hair were affected.

We should have radiated the hair on its own somehow. You cannot win them all!

We did experiments on blood to measure ailments, but someone else in the group took over the measurements. I am glad he did. They actually did well with those measurements and found early warning signs of some diseases.

Getting to the end of 1988, Dr. Buckmaster and I agreed to focus my Ph.D. on Electron Paramagnetic Resonance, EPR, imaging, which is the EPR equivalent of magnetic resonance imaging, MRI. I spent two weeks in the University of Denver that winter, learning about their imaging experience. I fixed my device so I could do the measurements. I did early imaging experiments. I felt I had either done enough work or that I could do whatever little was needed on a part-time basis. I was now serious about getting a proper job and providing properly for my growing family. My first daughter, *Fatima*, was born in September 1987 and with three children, I needed more money than I was earning.

I launched an aggressive campaign of applying for all applicable positions. I did not get many interviews. Actually, I only got one with the research and development director of a telephone company. It was an interesting interview where I did not think I did very well because it focused on communications. I had been away from the field for ten years. I did not hear from the director long after the promised deadline; so I called him and was pleasantly surprised to have gotten the job. I learnt afterwards the company was asked by the human rights commission to balance its workforce to include more minorities. I, of course, thanked God for the opportunity. I know there are many others to thank.

I told Dr. Buckmaster about my decision to finish the Ph.D. on a part-time basis. He told me that it was okay, but that I should stay a few more months full-time. I tried to explain to him I had only one job offer in the real world and that I did not plan on passing on it. He was not pleased at all about my decision and told me to talk to other members of my supervisory committee. I talked to Dr. Mike Smith of the Department of Electric Engineering, who said statistically, no one in my position ever finished the Ph.D. on a part-time basis. I wanted to be the first, but he insisted I wouldn't. This was sufficient challenge for me to put my mind into finishing.

I was building a reputation as an expert on electromagnetics and

electrodynamics and asked to review papers by other researchers before they were published in scientific journals. I was invited to write two chapters in a book on electromagnetics phenomena and invited to give lectures on my work in conferences and other companies.

I worked every weekend at the university making more measurements and every evening analyzing results. Dr. Buckmaster did not willingly accept that I was close to finishing. In writing my thesis, I wanted to include all the papers I published during my Ph.D. This was unusual. The university never had a Ph.D. thesis like that. There were eleven chapters in the thesis, ten of them were based on published papers and one on the new unpublished imaging work. I was ready for my oral examination in January 1992.

Cutting a long story short, I had two oral examinations for my Ph.D., I passed both but, in both examinations, my thesis did not pass. The reason was that I had insisted to include all the work that I had done and published in reputable journals in the body of my thesis. Both examining committees did not approve of this. I had complained and almost sued the university after the first examination over a legality. The second committee gave me clear directions to focus the thesis on any one of the eleven topics I had and to put the rest in appendices. This seemed like a good compromise. The second examination was in February 1993.

I was then happy I had done the work needed for a Ph.D. and only some fine-tuning was left. With this thought, I lost any motivation to finish the Ph.D. If not for a life-changing experience in September 1993 involving understanding the meaning of an event that happened in 1974 between me and a trader of second hand merchandise, I would have let the deadline lapse. I already made that decision in August 1993. With the help of a good friend with typing and editing, I managed to revise the thesis and resubmit it days before the deadline. I received my Ph.D. within days and was listed amongst the June 1994 graduates.

During my difficulties in finishing my Ph.D., I partnered with Dr. Michel Fattouche of the Department of Electrical Engineering. We published many papers together and we applied for three or four patents. I had become an expert on electromagnetic propagation of signals and the distortion the propagation channel introduces to signals. By the time I got my Ph.D., I had over thirty-four publications in refereed journals, conferences, and books. I chaired sessions in conferences, and was a

guest speaker in one conference.

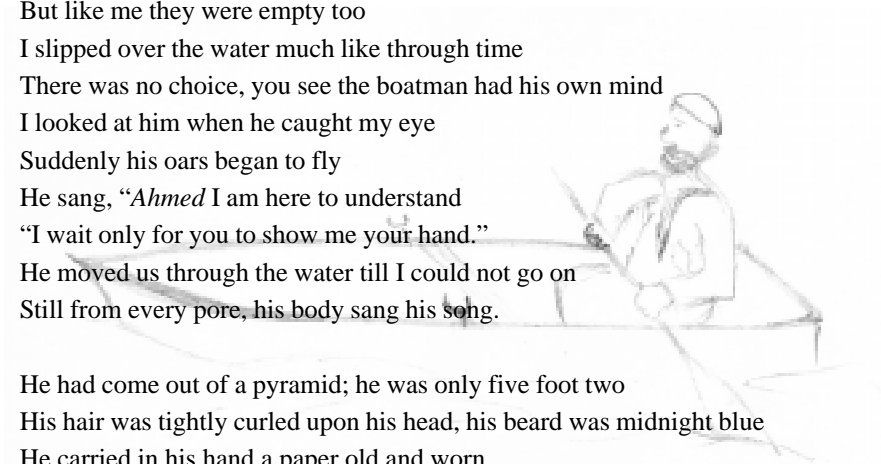
The Egyptian

By Orla Aaquist

1985 Version

I sailed along the Nile searching for my soul
The days were clear and warm, but my body was cold
There were giant jars of ceramic blue
But like me they were empty too
I slipped over the water much like through time
There was no choice, you see the boatman had his own mind
I looked at him when he caught my eye
Suddenly his oars began to fly
He sang, "*Ahmed* I am here to understand
"I wait only for you to show me your hand."
He moved us through the water till I could not go on
Still from every pore, his body sang his song.

He had come out of a pyramid; he was only five foot two
His hair was tightly curled upon his head, his beard was midnight blue
He carried in his hand a paper old and worn
That he clutched tight to keep his fingers warm.
Like a primate with his hand inside a jar he's got ahold
Of a ball he wants to play with but his fingers won't unfold.
I sat there for a while to look at him
And suddenly his face began to grin
He said, "*Ahmed* I am here to understand
"But how can I find the truth with just one hand?"
Then he handed me the parchment that he had held so long



When I reached for it I finally heard his song.

I read the words upon the paper, they were faint and worn but fine
They said,

“What do you get when you cross an Egyptian with an Israeli brine?

“You get nothing but the best Californian wine!”

The laughter rolled and then I started to cry.

When he gave me the manuscript, I knew it was mine, so

I offered him a hand and we sailed back to shore

Then he was gone and I saw him no more

Now we sing, “*Ahmed* we are here to understand

“But the truth we find is in our own hand.”

On a drifting piece of parchment I’d been searching for so long

Were the word that helped me carry on and on and on and on ...

The First Round of Muslim Work – 1983 to 1993

In the University of Calgary, we had a rotation system for the Friday speech. Muslims pray in congregation at noon on Friday. It replaces one of the five daily prayers, the noon prayer. It is preceded by a speech that can be as short as four minutes but as long as the preacher wants.

In *Sunni Islam*, there are no clergy. There is no order based on scholastic degrees in *Islam*. God judges people based on their piety. Of course, a system has been developed and most people with university degrees in religious studies try to monopolize the religion, but it has never fully succeeded. In the university, we rarely had a true Muslim scholar. For this reason, the students agreed to rotate the Friday speech between them. As soon as I joined the university, I was asked to join the rotation. We often read those speeches from books. I do not recall all the topics I talked about.

Paul Milligan, who at the time was a lab technician in the EPR group at the University and later joined me in almost every venture since, was in search of his spirituality. We had wonderful discussions about *Islam*. We created a study group in the fall of 1984 with *Qasim Syed* and another brother from Bangladesh. Together, we studied the book of “Hope and Fear” by *Ghazali*. This went on for a few weeks, but it was terminated because the Bangali brother was pushing Paul to become a Muslim. Why not if he was studying a Muslim literature? It was unfortunate because I never read the book alone after that. Paul and I discussed a lot of philosophy. He was instrumental in helping me cement my understanding of traditionally complex subjects, such as fate, destiny, and others.

In the fall term of 1985, I dared to give a speech about love. It was

generally about the fact that Muslims have dropped the focus of *Islam* on love. Prophet *Mohammed* truly loved his wife *Khadija* and remembered her long after her death. He also loved his wife Aisha. We know of a lot of sweet romantic situations between them. He also taught, “None of you is a complete believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” Over the years, scholars have agreed that “brother” refers to all of mankind. This is a degree higher than “do to others as you would have them do unto you.” It was really about loving everybody else.

With this love, one can run into apparent contradictions. How can one love someone and then cut their hand because they stole? The answer is simple: the society cuts his hand if he steals because this is the best way for him to redeem his sin. We want each person to redeem him or herself so they are not punished in hell. *Islam* is often accused of being a religion of cutting hands and stoning married adulterers. The truth is that Prophet *Mohammed* did not himself stone a married adulterer. In one instance, a married lady came to him confessing adultery. He turned his face away from her twice and in the third time asked her, “Do you understand the consequence of your action?” She replied, “Yes.” He then asked her, “Are you pregnant because of this?” She said, “Yes.” He told her to go away until she delivered. She returned nine months later with the baby. Again, he tried to ignore her. She insisted. He ordered her to go away for two years whilst she nursed her baby. She came back after two years. Once again, he tried to ignore her. When she insisted, he instructed his followers to take her away and stone her. When they returned, he asked about it. One person commented that the cursed one moved when she was being stoned. The Prophet told him, “She is not cursed; she repented enough that if her repentance was distributed over all of mankind, it would suffice them.”

I think *Mohammed* loved all of mankind. This was one of his biggest secrets in winning hearts and minds and in affecting the miraculous transformation he did, with the help of *Allah*, in Arabia. *Islam* stones married adulterers, but only if many conditions are satisfied about the state and the education including that the adulterers confess willingly or if there are four witnesses who witness the act of penetration. According to the Prophet, they have to witness the penetration like they witness a

thread going through a needle. I personally thought that for this to happen, the witnessed person would have to be a porn star or an instructor. One time, two men came to the Prophet and told him they witnessed someone exposed in the act of making love. He told them, "Could not you have covered him?" The love for a brother in this situation is to try to spare him the punishment.

An important story regarding punishing adulterers happened during the reign of second Caliph *Omar bin AlKhattab*. A maiden committed adultery. Omar, in his council, asked her, "Did you commit adultery?" She replied, "Yes with so and so for a few bucks." He asked his council what to do with her. *Ali bin Abi Talib*, the fourth Caliph, said, "Whip her." *Othman bin Affan*, the third Caliph, said, "I see her belittling the crime; send her to be educated." *Omar* agreed with *Othman*. This shows that the laws in Islam are not applied blindly; rather, deep analysis of each situation is required.

In any case, I gave a speech summarizing these issues. After the speech, two other students came up to me and scolded me for talking openly about things like penetration and porn in a speech. They were fuming with anger. I realized I gave a speech about love and was hated for it. Being an optimist, I knew that many had heard me. I hoped that most actually agreed with me. I realized many Muslims had lost the true focus of *Islam*. They shifted the focus from absolute love to God and through him to all creatures to the application of the laws and rules of *Islam*.

I continued to give these speeches but at a lesser frequency. Some of the brothers were now openly opposed to my way of thinking. I recall two other confrontations with the opposition ringleader about my "love" speech. The first was about *Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen*, the Muslim Brothers or Brotherhood. In 1985, during a visit to Egypt, I read an article in a series about the memoirs of *Mohammed Naguib*, one of the leaders of the 1952 coup in Egypt, the guardian over the minor King *Ahmad Fouad II*, and the first president of Egypt until *Gamal Abdul Nasser* removed him in 1953. *Naguib* was in prison from 1953 until after *Sadat* took office in 1970 then served under house arrest. *Yasser Abu Moustafa*, a Cairo University classmate and a Professor at the California Institute of Technology, told a story about when he left his

apartment in *Zamalek*, Cairo, and his shoulder hit that of a neighbor. He was immediately thoroughly searched by plain-clothed policemen. He did not understand any of it. They asked him, "Do you know who your neighbor is?" He replied, "No." They explained, "It is *Mohammed Naguib*. He is not allowed to communicate with the outside world." I read in *Naguib's* article, "If I was not allowed to communicate from 1953 until 1984, do you not think I have something to say that others were afraid of?" I found this to be a good question. He went on to explain that *Nasser* fabricated the Brotherhood assassination attempt October 1954. Anyone who doubted what he was saying should just go to their older parents and ask them, "What did you think of *Hassan AlBanna*? What did you think of the Brotherhood?" *Hassan AlBanna* founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. He was himself assassinated by King *Farouk's* government over his alleged role in the assassination of the Egyptian Prime Minister. I followed *Naguib's* advice on the spot and asked my mom those questions. Her reply was that *AlBanna* was a wonderful man and that the Brotherhood was good. This was in contradiction of what she would have told me in 1965, when *Syed Qutb*, a prominent leader of the Brotherhood was executed. I figured out that when people are reminded of the mannerism of *AlBanna*, they are reminded of the good in the Brotherhood movement. I shared this with my nemesis whom we will call *Fahd*. *Fahd* was going to kill me. He actually told me, "You are just a little child delving into things much bigger than you. *Naguib* is a bitter liar who is just jealous of *Nasser's* achievements." It was my first real brush with a *Nasserite*, people who have glorified *Nasser's* person and believe in his cause of pan-Arabism.

The second big argument was over the *fatwa*, Islamic decree or ruling, by *Ayatollah Khomeini* on *Salman Rushdie* for his book, "Satanic Verses." I felt I had something to say. I had read *Salman's* book, "The Midnight Children" in 1983, long before the controversy about "The Satanic Verses." In early *Islam*, when Muslims were worried about losing followers and to discourage people from flip-flopping in and out of *Islam*, a ruling that anybody who abandons *Islam* knowingly is given three days to revert back to *Islam*. If he does not, he is then executed. I believed this ruling needed to be investigated for its applicability to the current

situation, where there is a need for total religious freedom. Further from reading “The Midnight Children,” I understood it was a fictional biography of *Rushdie* and as such, *Rushdie* may have never reaffirmed his *Islam*.

Reaffirming *Islam* is a concept that most Muslims do not talk about. Most Muslims were born Muslim, learned to believe in the *Quran*, and to respect Muslim rituals. However, as one passes puberty, one is supposed to decide for him or her self whether they want to be a Muslim. This is the process of reaffirmation. I believe that no one knew if *Rushdie* re-affirmed his faith. Accordingly, it is wrong to have the *fatwa* about reversion applied to him. I also believed that *Rushdie* was totally wrong, in any case, to write a book possibly ridiculing a great man like Prophet *Mohammed*. I thought that his punishment for this, and I do believe in sacred justice, is to live much of his life in hiding.

I expressed these views to a group of Muslims at a friend’s house in 1990. This was before the noon prayer. *Fahd* was there. Again, *Fahd* implied I knew nothing and should not comment on big subjects like whether *Khomeini* was right or not. I then replied he was ignorant and brainwashed. I agonized over what I said for the rest of the day and went to his office in the university that evening to apologize. He proudly accepted my apology.

I began to work for the Research and Development department of the telephone company in June 1989. This was a few months before the Satanic incident with *Fahd*. At the same time, Dr. *Mohammed Abdrabbu*, a post-doctoral fellow from Egypt, was researching at the department of mechanical engineering and I commenced to rub shoulders with him. I learned shortly before that I was reading some of the most commonly read chapters of the *Quran* incorrectly. In the very last verse of the very last chapter of the *Quran*, there is a verse that asks for *Allah*’s protection from the evil of *Jennati* (demons) and people. The word *Jenna*, demons, used in that verse, had the same shape but different pronunciation as the word *Janna*, heaven. At the beginning of 1989, I used to ask for protection from the evil of heaven and people. There is another verse in that chapter that prays for protection from the devil calling him *waswas*, the cursed person who whispers in our ears. I used to say *wiswas*, as opposed to *waswas*. Because of these revelations, I was in a newer and humbler

learning mode. When I learnt Dr. *Abdrabbu* knew the *Quran* by heart, I had a sudden respect for him and decided to visit with him more often. When he and I first chatted, he told me he had prayed behind me before and used to call me to himself, *Hatim* of the wiswas. Dr. *Abdrabbu* and I had interesting arguments about the fate of Christians and whether they would go to hell or heaven. I preferred to stick to the view, “I do not care where they go. It will not bother me in the Day of Judgment to find them as my neighbors in heaven. It would bother me if I were in hell.” He had a stricter view, which he probably changed by now, that they are disbelievers, and as such, are in hell.

The subject of Christianity in *Islam* is a big one. It is best to address it separately, since my own views on the subject have changed over time.

By 1989, *Qasim Syed*, who by then was Dr. *Qasim* and teaching physics at Mount Royal College in Calgary, was the vice president of the *Islamic Circle of North America* (ICNA). This was a group that split from the larger *Islamic Society of North America* (ISNA) years earlier because of ISNA’s lack of focus on study groups. ICNA also focused on the work of *Abu Ala al-Mawdudi*, Pakistan’s founder of an *Islamic* movement paralleling that of *AlBanna*’s Brotherhood in Egypt. Dr. *Qasim* called and asked me to come and give a talk in a Sunday study group or circle, *halaqa*, about some verses of the *Quran*. He lured me by complimenting me on having given good speeches at the university and that he missed them. I, of course, was flattered and agreed. I became a regular at the ICNA Sunday lecture for a few years. This *halaqa* circle was a wonderful opportunity for me to meet wonderful workers like *Abdul Majid Quraishi*, *Tarek Amin*, *Kazi Ahmed*, and many other wonderful brothers.

I recall that most of the people attending the *halaqa* on Sundays were Pakistanis. We were all dressed in pants and shirts. One Sunday, when I was learning to recite a supplication just as I say *Allahu Akbar* and enter into the regular prayers, an Egyptian man attended a *halaqa*. He was dressed in a *gilbab*, the national dress in Egypt and typical Muslim attire that was worn by Prophet *Mohammed*. When it came time to pray the noon prayer, the Imam was absent. We did not think much and invited the man in the *gilbab* to lead the prayers. He was supposed to lead us in

the actions, which is to raise the hands to the level of the ears and say *Allahu Akbar*. The noon prayer is four *rak'aas* or units. A unit is to recite *AlFatiha*, the first chapter of the *Quran*, and then to bow down. One then stands straight and prostrates, then sits down and prostrates. This is a complete unit. In the first two units, it is desirable to read any extra *Quran* after *AlFatiha*. After two *rak'aas*, you can rest for a bit and recite *Al-Tashahhud*, a special dialogue that took place when Prophet *Mohammed* visited heaven. Our *gilbated* friend did the actions so fast that I wasn't able to change to say the obligatory sayings. I was certain we all had to repeat the prayers.

The following week, a man came to shake my hands and thank me. He was from Egypt and told me his brother came to the mosque the week before and we had asked him to lead the prayers. This raised his spirits so much; it may have miraculously cured him. I asked, "What is he sick with?" He replied, "Not much; he is in a mental institute and is getting better. He was out last Sunday on a day pass." That experience taught me to learn the rules about how to choose an Imam to lead the prayers and taught me to stick to them.

The Muslim community of Calgary was interesting. I had never been involved in the politics of the community and had good reasons for that. I heard they often threw chairs at each other in community meetings and that many of their actions and decisions were un-*Islamic*. The leaders had a bad reputation. They would ask what *Allah* ordained and then would vote on the ruling. I recall they were labeled as a bunch of Lebanese taxi drivers that wanted to run things like a small village in Lebanon. I never wanted to have anything to do with such a group. Before Dr. *Qasim*'s invitation, I don't think I ever went to the mosque, other than for an occasional Friday prayer. I think I was afraid the first time I went.

I became a close friend with *Majid* and *Kazi*. With *Majid*, I had a special bond because of Afghanistan. My wife's heritage, together with my love for the country, and the *Mujahideen* were echoed by his Pashton heritage and similar love. We often had tears in our eyes when we told each other stories of the Afghani *Mujahideen*. Things became more interesting in 1989, as I was delivering the Friday speech in bigger crowds of professionals downtown. I often used to read a communiqué from the *Mujahideen* before the speech. It was so uplifting because these

communiqués often told of victories and new cities being taken over by the *Mujahideen*. *Kazi* was a professional accountant who wanted the community run more like a business. I shared his sentiment.

In 1990, *Kazi* stood outside the community hall where we prayed and passed out pamphlets that said the land had been purchased and we were ready to build a new *Islamic* center in east Calgary. Until then, we only had a mosque in southwest Calgary. Having another mosque closer to where most Muslims lived sounded like a dream. *Kazi* announced a call for action, asking people to attend a weekend meeting to organize matters. I attended. There I learnt a deposit had been given to the City of Calgary against a piece of land and that the City was seriously considering the offer. We only had \$25,000 of the land price of \$229,000. We were not going to build for many years. I thought about all of this and wondered if *Kazi* tricked me into attending the meeting. I concluded, on the fly, that he did trick me but for a good cause. I would help him with his dream and signed on as his right-hand man for the initiative. As always, the difficulties in community meetings were exaggerated. The community was mostly run by Lebanese volunteers who did their best.

I attended my first special general body meeting in the mosque and was pleasantly surprised when no chairs were thrown at anyone. It got touchy at times but was always cordial. In that meeting, the Muslim Association of Calgary approved the establishment of a committee to run the affairs of building an *Islamic* center in east Calgary. This was a great victory for the initiative. Without this committee, funds were always taken away for regular mosque activities, and there was never a surplus for the new mosque.

Kazi got overzealous with *Majid* and me on his side. We established the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary as a charitable not-for-profit organization to manage the affairs of the new mosque and to have more independence from the Muslim Association of Calgary. We did not seek approval for this step. We considered the committee had the right to take it. We put an offer for a two-acre piece of land, but the community made noises they would object to establishing a mosque there. We then negotiated with the City for another lot. We went through the painful process of rezoning the land. I attended my only city council meeting for this purpose. We had a number of fundraisers, and I was the

spokesperson for the group. I don't think I earned this position. I was chosen because my family bridged the Arab and Pakistani communities that formed ninety percent of the Muslim community. We invited *Siraj Wahhaj* to raise funds. *Siraj* is an electrifying speaker who reverted to *Islam* years earlier. He was the Imam of a mosque in New York. His stories were always so powerful. In one event, at the University of Calgary, we raised \$89,000 in cash, checks, and pledges. This was a remarkable increase from earlier fundraisers. *Siraj* and I shared wonderful moments together.

Regarding one particular pledge, I called the phone number on the pledge sheet and asked for the name. I explained I was calling from the MCFC, and that at a fundraising dinner in May 1991, they had pledged \$1,000, and that I was trying to collect it. From what I understood, the person I was speaking to was the named individual. He sounded like he knew exactly what I was talking about. I heard him quiet for a while; then he called his son and shouted at him, "Why did you fill a pledge form with my name when I did not tell you?" I guess he was trying to get out of paying. I let him off. I always laugh when I remember this story. Unfortunately, this is common in fundraising pledges. I think I have a few pledges of my own that are still outstanding. However, much of the money was collected.

During this period, a number of Egyptians, members of the Brotherhood, including Dr. *Mahmoud Jilani* and Dr. *Mohammed Hassan*, and Lebanese members began showing up at more and more events. Dr. Jilani was about ten years younger than me. He had memorized the *Quran* and was very knowledgeable. He became our unofficial Imam, leading the prayers, and giving the Friday speeches. I often translated his speeches for him after he delivered them and later translated them for him to read. By the end of his Ph.D., he mastered the language and gave the speeches totally on his own. *Mohammed* was a fiery character who often yelled to get his point of view across. I saw right through his character and recognized he was a wonderful person. Admittedly, *Mohammed* had a larger impact on me than *Mahmoud*, but the rest of the community was more impacted by *Mahmoud*. Regardless of this small amount of politics, the group met regularly in my house.

I need to say that, in November 1990, we moved locations. We now had our own house with a basement suite. It needed a lot of work. We bought it with the hope of knocking it and its neighboring house down to build an apartment building; my brother, *Ahmed*, and my friend, Michel Fattouche, partnered with me in purchasing the two homes. The basement suite was originally intended for my mom when she came to stay with us in the winter. She fell outside on the ice and did not like the lack of mobility in winter, so she decided to go back to Egypt. We tried to rent it out, but it did not last. It was ideal for use by my friends.

The Arab group included *Rashed Haydar*, *Nasser Omar*, *Mahmoud Jilani*, *Mohammed Hassan*, and me. *Rashed*, *Nasser* and I met more often to do the work. The work we quickly settled on doing was newspaper work. An Arabic newspaper, *Al-Moghtarib*, The Immigrant, was starting in Calgary. It had a bit of a Muslim tilt but was mostly Arab. We met with its editor, and over time, agreed to buy it from him and convert it to an *Islamic* newspaper in 1991. We learned about publishing. I paid \$2,000 to buy the paper. We changed its name to *Al-Aqsa*. *Rashed* and *Nasser* did most of the work. Other brothers joined occasionally.

One day, *Majid* brought *Ibrahim*, an Algerian that applied for refugee status in Canada, to *Al-Aqsa's* office in the basement of my house. He needed a place to stay, and *Al-Aqsa's* office was not used by anyone else. He said he had been a colonel in the Algerian army and had to leave after he learnt that some of the heads of the Algerian army were actually Israelis intelligence officers with Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service. He said this was the reason the Algerian army took control over the government after the first round of parliamentary elections in January 1992 when the Muslims won by a wide margin. He claimed he had proof of this that was couriered to him from elsewhere. We published his story in *Al-Aqsa*. This was probably the only story we published that was so unique.

Within days of publishing the articles, he received a package he was waiting for that (he said) contained the documents proving his story. Before I could see the documents, he insisted on leaving Canada for the US. He felt his life was being threatened. All my family was sad to see him go. He was very nice to my kids and had taken them around downtown, buying them ice cream. Working with the community had its

advantages. I asked him to call when arrived at his destination: New Orleans. Some time in September 1992, I had a message on *Al-Aqsa's* answering machine to call Colonel *Ibrahim*. When I called the following day, a girl answered and informed me there was no Colonel *Ibrahim* there. She, however, did not hang up the phone. She kept telling me she lived in a small town in Louisiana and had never received a long distance call before. She kept asking questions about *Ibrahim* to see if she knew him and if she could help me. It all sounded too suspicious; it was like he was caught by whomever he feared was chasing him and they were checking the trace.

There was a minor issue brewing between the group of the Brothers and the mosque. I thank God I was never there for any of the actual problems. The management of the mosque once called the police to stop the group from worshipping in the mosque. The group prayed outside the mosque. Eventually, their prayers were more popular than the mosque's. There were many factors that contributed to this. In mid 1992, I attended my second special general body meeting of the Muslim Association of Calgary. We decided to replace the Imam of the community. This appeared as a compromise between the two feuding groups. After this meeting, I was asked by someone if I would be interested in running as the president of the association. Given that all the meetings I saw had been civil, I asked this person, "But what if anyone throws a chair at me?" He replied, "Nobody will; I am the one who used to start it, and I will protect you." I laughed and accepted the nomination.

By November 1992, I was the president of the Muslim Association of Calgary and the vice president of the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary. This was a very strange circumstance. These were feuding organizations. *Mahmoud Jilani's* work was sponsored by the MCFC, and accordingly, it was much more popular than the MAC. I once asked *Kazi* to join the two organizations together. He responded, "Have you gone crazy? Why would we do that? The MCFC is doing all the work of this community; why would we give it on a silver platter to the MAC?" It was a good question but missed the number one goal of Muslims: to be united.

By 1993, we bought the land for the East Calgary *Islamic Center*;

we obtained the development permit for a beautiful building that was designed by an *Ismaili* (but *Ismailis* are another story). We raised funds to build a complete center, but most importantly, a school. The MCFC endeavored to operate a school in the basement of the mosque and planned to move it to trailers at the new site. We built a house for the Imam on the new site that we thought could be home to some of our prayers until we erected the larger building. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein attended the groundbreaking ceremony.

Being one of the original signatories of the MCFC constitution and having owned the soft copy of it, I was very familiar with it. I knew that twenty-five members calling for a special body meeting could force a change of management and demand unity between the MCFC and MAC. I began collecting the signatures on a sheet of paper when someone told *Kazi* of my plans. This strained the relationship. *Kazi* had not held any general body meetings since starting the organization. We speculated that he feared the general body would request a union of the two organizations.

When I became the president of MAC, we owed over \$70,000. Shortly after we took over, it was *Ramadan* and we raised over \$150,000, which was a record amount. *Ramadan* is a wonderful time of the year in the Muslim community. You fast during the day (dawn until dusk) from eating, drinking, smoking (for the unfortunate ones that do smoke), taking any medicine through the mouth, nose or veins, and from making love. This fasting helps one cleanse his body and remember to be otherwise a good Muslim. At night, we pray together in the mosque for an hour and half. In the middle of the prayers, the preacher would give a short lecture. When things work right, the atmosphere is electrifying. Add to this that the MCFC and MAC prayed in the same place.

We had money in the bank for our medium term operations. This was a new thing for the MAC. *Shaikh Jamal Hammoud* joined us in November 1992 from London, Ontario. He was young and energetic. He was also sympathetic to the Brothers' cause, and this helped unite all *Sunni* factions in the city. The MCFC was used to praying *Eid-ul-Fitr* prayer, which is a group prayer on the first day after *Ramadan* around 9:00 am outside the mosque, which was more appropriately along the tradition of Prophet *Mohammed*. MAC had never prayed outside the

mosque. *Shaikh Jamal* was approached inquiring about where we would hold the prayers. There was a big concern that the elders would be very upset. I asked him to leave it to me. I got up during one of the night prayers and made a short statement that we would pray outside. There was no room in the mosque for everyone. Arrangements had been made to pray in the soccer center. An elder stated, "I want to pray in the mosque." I replied, "You can pray, but arrange for your own speaker and everything else." This ended that debate. We arranged for the speaker and maintained the mosque but had the first united prayer outside the mosque. It was wonderful. Over seven thousand people prayed together. We prayed in one soccer field, and the younger children played on the other fields. It was music to my ears to hear the kids playing and laughing. Someone complained to me afterwards about the noise the kids made. I asked him, "Wasn't it wonderful." He pondered for a while and said, "Yes, it was." The end of *Ramadan* was interesting. We went out to check whether we could see the new moon of *Shawwal*, the month after *Ramadan*. If we saw the new moon then the next day would be the beginning of *Shawwal*. If we did not, then we had to fast the following day. I forgot my glasses, which I did not need all the time. We looked where we should have looked, and for a moment or two, I saw the new moon and told everyone. No one else saw it. We went back to the mosque and *Shaikh Jamal* called ISNA to consult with them. They asked to talk to me. I told them what I saw. They asked, "Where was it in the sky?" I did not know how to answer. They clarified, "Was it below or above Mercury?" I replied it was between Mercury and Venus. They did not tell me anything. We declared the end of *Ramadan* and celebrated *Eid-ul-Fitr* the following day. Later, we learnt that ISNA and many other cities continued to fast, and some of them caused angry demonstrations by their constituents. They were fasting two days after Saudi and other Arab countries.

Things went well after *Ramadan*. There were no problems in the mosque. We learnt that *Shaikh Jamal* liked to go to *Hajj* every year. *Hajj* is a pilgrimage to *Mecca* where over four million Muslims from around the world gather around a hill called Arafa or *Arafat* on the eighth night of the last Muslim Month, *Zilhijja* or the month of the pilgrimage. The pilgrims, *hajis*, spend one full day there and then spend a night at

Muzdalafa, a valley between *Arafa* and *Mina*. They spend three to four nights (optional) at *Mina*. During this period, they are all dressed in similar simple garments, *Ihram*. Men wear unstitched white cloth and women simple dresses. This is a perfect show of equality. *Shaikh Jamal* made a habit of a yearly *Hajj*, combined with a visit to his ailing dad in Lebanon. This caused us a minor problem. We learnt of his absence late and did not have anyone in town who could comfortably lead the prayers on the tenth day of the month. This was another prayer like the one at the end of *Ramadan*. Given our success at *Eid-ul-Fitr*, we expected a larger crowd for this *Eid-ul-Adha*. We scrambled and called other communities. We called *Siraj Wahhaj*, who declined but recommended a young protégé called *Abdul Malik*. We invited *Abdul Malik*, and he graciously accepted.

I picked up *Abdul Malik* in my red sports car, a 1986 Fiero I bought in 1989. He was impressed the president of a Muslim community was open-minded enough to drive a sports car. On the trip from the airport to his hotel, he explained to me he just had a disagreement with *Siraj* and was at a point in his life where he could possibly look to stay in Calgary.

He suggested that, given the open-mindedness he was witnessing, he thought this might be all serendipity. I promised to discuss it with the directors of MAC. He led the prayers and everyone loved him. He played basketball with the youth, and the mosque was the busiest it had ever been during summer holidays. He worked wonders with the youth.

The directors discussed the issue of *Abdul Malik*. A few brothers agreed they would give him an honorarium from their own pockets, if he stayed two summer months. If it worked out, we would work on his papers. If it did not, nothing would happen. Two directors objected for various reasons. One, I believe, was worried we were engaging another Imam whilst our Imam was absent. The directors did approve the plan, and the next morning, I received a call from Canada Immigration investigating if I had broken any law by offering him the arrangement. I answered all their questions honestly. The investigator told me at the end of the call, "Thank you for your cooperation. I do not know why a director on your council would call us and complain about such a simple situation." I was deeply offended a director had done this.

Over the next few days, I heard a lot of complaints about my lack of presence in the mosque. I asked them, "Are things here good?" They

replied, “Yes.” I asked, “Why do you want me here if things are good, and I am taking care of them remotely?” They had no answer. However, these were my strongest supporters. This complaint, combined with the issue with Canada Immigration, were the final straws that made me decide to resign from my position as president of MAC. I was losing my friendship with *Kazi* and was only hearing criticism. I was extremely busy with my new business, Wi-LAN Inc.

This was June 1993 and things were really hot in Calgary. I knew that sooner or later, I had to make a decision. I hoped if the community had no problems, I could cruise for the remainder of the term. However, it became apparent that I could not. I resigned. I went to *Abdul Malik* and told him the news. I was his biggest supporter in Calgary and did not want him to think I was abandoning him. When I finished telling him, “This does not mean we will not meet. I will still come to the mosque for a chat.” He interrupted me saying, “We will never meet again.” I tried repeatedly to prove him wrong, but I never did.

A few days later, I heard some members of the community had a problem with *Abdul Malik*. They approached me about it. As I tried to mediate, I realized it was too late. One person led the charge to have him removed immediately. I told him, “You will be the first to suffer.” A year later, his son, who was a fan of *Abdul Malik* and frequented the mosque with *Abdul Malik*, ran away for a few days and did some crazy things. We also had to scramble to collect the promised honorarium earlier than planned. *Abdul Malik* left after three weeks or so. The mosque became empty again.

My involvement with the community was now limited to my dwindling editing of the newspaper. *Rashed* began working for Wi-LAN in April 1993, and this got us close to each other on a daily basis. I was regularly briefed on the happenings of the community this way. However, by September 1993, I was totally occupied by business. Other members of the community worked for Wi-LAN at various times providing more of a link to the community and its news. In the summer of 1994, I was told of a meeting in the Calgary Multicultural Center and that this was the materialization of my wish for a meeting of the MCFC to unite it with the MAC. I was asked to go to the meeting and was familiar with the constitution and had some familiarity with who the members were. I

went reluctantly. I was aware there could be trouble. I sat in the middle of the crowd and learnt there were *Ahmadis* present acting as members of the MCFC. *Ahmadis* or *Qadyanis* believe in *Allah* and that *Mohammed* is his messenger but add that a man by the name *Mirza Ghulam Ahmed* was a prophet. In some of their literature they assumed that *Mirza Ghulam Ahmed* was Jesus Christ's second coming. I did not want to bring the presence of *Ahmadis* up unless there was an issue about voting. I had to interrupt *Kazi*, who was chairing the meeting twice, to remind him of the actual rules. Others interrupted him many more times and often rudely. He, unfortunately, caused much of it and refused to accept any motion from the floor with regards to the unity issue. Things threatened to become violent. Police were on hand and intervened twice. The second time, they asked the meeting, "Is there anyone present you can all agree to delegate the chairmanship of the meeting to?" I was surprised when everyone suggested me. When I went on the stage, I accepted the motion. *Kazi* tried to interrupt me. I went behind the curtain, hugged him, and said, "*Kazi*, you are going to lose the fight against unity; you might as well join in and modify the resolution to something you can live with. I promise I will give you enough chance to give everyone your input." We agreed to proceed this way. Finally, the resolution was modified from an original dissolution of the MCFC and incorporated under MAC to establish a new council, the Muslim Council of Calgary, that was to be higher than both organizations. This was acceptable to all. Ultimately, this proved very wise. For a few years, MAC, through some accounting problems, lost its charitable status and the community would have struggled without the charitable status of the MCFC still active.

I disappeared from the scene until the end of 1998.

At the end of 1998, a group of people asked me if we should hold a business dinner to try to get some of the Muslim business people motivated to work with the community. The top organizer, my brother *Essam*, could not make it to the dinner. Others talked. The main topic was the need for funding for the East Calgary *Islamic* Center and the associated school. I was moved by the talk. I had no cash to give. I had lots of free-trading shares: one hundred and ten thousand Cell-Loc shares trading around \$1 and six hundred and seventy thousand Wi-LAN shares trading around \$1.30. I wanted to give a meaningful amount. I decided

to donate around \$125,000 worth of shares: fifty thousand Cell-Loc and fifty thousand Wi-LAN, or something like that. One of the organizers, and a friend of mine, *Mohammed Sabbah*, came to me afterwards and said, “You have just made a wonderful trade. Your shares are going to go up so much.” I thanked him for his kind thoughts but did not make much of it.

Shaikh Jamal left Calgary in 1997. He came back for a fundraising dinner at the end of 1999. Given that the shares I donated were starting to be worth well over \$1,000,000 and growing, against my wish, they sat me at the head table. At this dinner, I asked *Shaikh Jamal* about his target. He indicated \$100,000. I told him I was willing to match all collected to a maximum of \$250,000. With all praise due to *Allah*, we raised about \$500,000 that night. My accountant, who was also managing my charitable donations, did not want me to donate shares directly to the community. Instead, I donated them to a charity he controlled, which gave the community the funds. This generated some friction. He imposed rules I never wanted to impose. Some members thought I was starting to change because of my newfound wealth.

The Wi-LAN Years

1993 to 2005

In 1989, I thought I was close to finishing my Ph.D., so I accepted employment with the research and development department of a telephone company. I quickly realized close was not good enough. I put a lot of energy towards achieving the Ph.D. but wasn't getting any closer. However, the phone company work fascinated me. It was a great time to be in wireless communications. Cellular phones were gaining in popularity and there was a large unmet need for digital cellular phones for higher capacity, better quality, and security. By luck, I was able to lead a large team of people, from several companies and institutions, to define how the phone company should enter the digital cellular market. It was a wonderful experience with all the proper means for fast learning. I soon became an expert in the field.

Together with my Egyptian friend and partner, Dr. Michel Fattouche, we wrote many papers and filed a few patents. It was a good partnership that yielded early fruits. We wanted to expand this partnership and were looking at ways to do business together. We had crazy ideas in that regard. Michel wanted to develop a silencer for toilet flushing, and I wanted to develop a bag around nail clippers to collect the clippings.

We eventually developed the wideband orthogonal frequency division multiplexing technology (WOFDM). We recognized it would be an excellent foundation for all high-speed wireless communications in the not-too-distant future. Any reader of the patent (filed in 1992) will recognize we had a clear understanding for the potential of the technology and a clearer vision for the future. We tried to commercialize it through the phone company I worked for, but given that, at the time, we were having a tough time commercializing our first patent through the phone company, we agreed to attempt to commercialize it via the technology transfer office at the University of Calgary.

Michel and I were losing hope that we were going to be filthy-rich out of this technology. We had lowered our expectations from millions of dollars to ten thousand dollars. I recall a telephone conversation where Michel asked me if it was ten thousand each. I do not recall my answer, but I definitely thought, “altogether.”

Around September 1993, I had a rare opportunity to sell my ownership in Wi-LAN for US\$5 million. However, events led me to believe I had to stay. These events mostly had to do with the belief that I could make it worth much more. I felt a need to look after the other shareholders, who trusted me with their investment.

Wi-LAN struggled for the next five and half years. Fred left the company in January 1994. Our prototype did not prove as fast as we wanted. It did prove we could build WOFDM products cheaply, but we were not impressed with the speed. Employees stepped in and assisted with the company from 1994 to 1997. They helped me manage and raise the needed funds.

Everything went wrong in Wi-LAN’s initial public offering (IPO). The Alberta Securities Commission held the prospectus for six months on a minor infraction. This delay made a lot of the potential investors nervous. The day the company went public in March 1998, the exchange had problems, and it confused the investors. The bids disappeared electronically. The company ended up trading late and went down for the day. Things got worse, and by early 1999, the stock was at one half of its IPO value.

I believe I was the first CEO of a respectable public company that began posting on the Internet. I frequented two chat sites: Silicon Investor and Stock House. When I first joined in late 1998, I was mainly answering questions about the company within disclosure guidelines. I also gave short tutorials about WOFDM and Wi-LAN’s patents. It was a good experience. I made a lot of shareholder friends that I never met. Wi-LAN became somewhat of a cult with its believers. As bashers of Wi-LAN appeared late in 2000, this led to interesting hostile confrontations between the believers and the bashers. However, I stopped posting in early 2000, believing the stock had exceeded its intrinsic potential value and fearing that further promotion would only hurt all involved.

Wi-LAN led the high tech bubble of 1999 and 2000, both in going up and going down. At some point in 2000, both Wi-LAN and Cell-Loc qualified to be in the TSX300, which is an index for the top three hundred companies by market capitalization on the exchange. However, only Wi-LAN formally made it to the index and even to the TSX150. During an interview for Time magazine in March 2000, Michel noted the combined value of our family holdings were in excess of \$1 billion that day. I was actually surprised, since I rarely kept track of my personal net worth.

I never really cashed any of my investment in Wi-LAN. I actually sold other assets to invest in Wi-LAN. My mom lucked out. She wanted to buy a house in Egypt and sold some of her shares. She also sold shares to give money to the needy in Egypt. Then in July 2000, I sold about one million dollars worth of my Cell-Loc shares to buy a house along the Gulf in Pensacola, Florida.

2005 to 2006

By 2005, the company was losing money for the last five quarters and revenues were declining. The board felt compelled to act. They removed me from my position as executive chairman and removed Dr. *Sisso El Hamamsy* from his position as president and CEO. This was again, contrary to my advice. The company had turned the corner, as evidenced by an unprecedented order backlog. My advice was to leave *Sisso* and myself in our positions and introduce two or more directors in an executive committee to help *Sisso* run the company. This would have ensured the public market would reward the company for its good announcements. The board was anxious for change for varying reasons, depending on the board member. And change they introduced!

I left the board shortly thereafter. I joined again in the 2005 Annual General Meeting. The following year was difficult. The company did not stop losing money quickly enough and had to settle the patent infringement suit with Cisco lower than we could have if we were in a better financial situation. We were not aggressive enough after the settlement notifying other companies of our intent to enforce our rights.

A group of concerned shareholders approached me to complain about the lack of action. I argued with the shareholders; but quickly realized that they were right. I tried to reduce the chance of a confrontation and advised the shareholders to write a letter instead of demanding a meeting to present their concerns. The shareholders did that.

I had seen many opportunities for investment in the first business week in 2006 that I realized that it was time to step back in full force into the business world. This, together with the shareholders waking me up about the eroding value of Wi-LAN's potential because of lack of aggressive action, got me back into business. I thought that if I positioned myself in five or six small public companies, either the public market will turn around and their stocks will rise by themselves; or I could promote those companies to some of my investor friends. In either case, I felt strongly that there were enough opportunities for one to make lots of money on stocks within twenty-four months. I asked my loved ones to allow me to get back into business one hundred percent of the time. They understood. I invested in PsiNaptic Inc. and Dynex Power Inc. and increased my holdings in NTG Clarity Inc. With my holdings in Wi-LAN and other private companies, I felt set to capitalize on a market turnaround for small hi-tech companies.

I checked with the Wi-LAN board about their thoughts on the future potential of Wi-LAN and though we agreed in principle on actions to increase this potential, we did not seem to agree on the magnitude of the potential nor on the timing of actions. I eventually stepped down from the board and terminated my involvement with Wi-LAN. I was ready to sell all my shares in the company and actually started to. The concerned shareholders came to my office the day after I quit the board and asked me to accept to be nominated on an alternate slate of directors for the 2006 Annual General Meeting. I informed them that I cannot fight since I am deeply in the public eye again with my new investments, and I do not want any negative publicity. They promised to fight for me.

I started posting my views on an investment chat site, www.stockhouse.com. The concerned shareholders started a website to explain their views, www.savewi-lan.com. I was having fun until Wi-LAN sued us to shut down the website. This whole episode is worthy of a book. In any case, the lawsuit upset me and made me want to lead the

concerned shareholders to replace the incumbent board.

Proxy fights are a rare occurrence in companies. It is where two groups, typically one of them being the incumbent board of directors, and the other a group of concerned shareholders or someone interested in buying the company, approach the shareholders with letters and phone calls asking them to vote a particular way. Proxy fights are extremely hostile in nature; very expensive to both parties and exceptionally difficult to win if you are fighting the incumbent management and board. The incumbent board hired a firm to solicit proxies on their behalf and they put banner ads on the web. However, we were confident we were going to win since we felt our wishes were fully aligned with those of most shareholders. Eventually, we managed to avert the final vote through a resolution agreement between the concerned shareholders and the incumbent board that saw the concerned shareholders gain control over the company and I was once again voted in as Chairman of the Board of Wi-LAN. Wi-LAN re-aligned itself to become a patent enforcement company. A new Chief Executive Officer was hired. We commenced a new patent infringement lawsuit. Wi-LAN stock prices began to increase again.

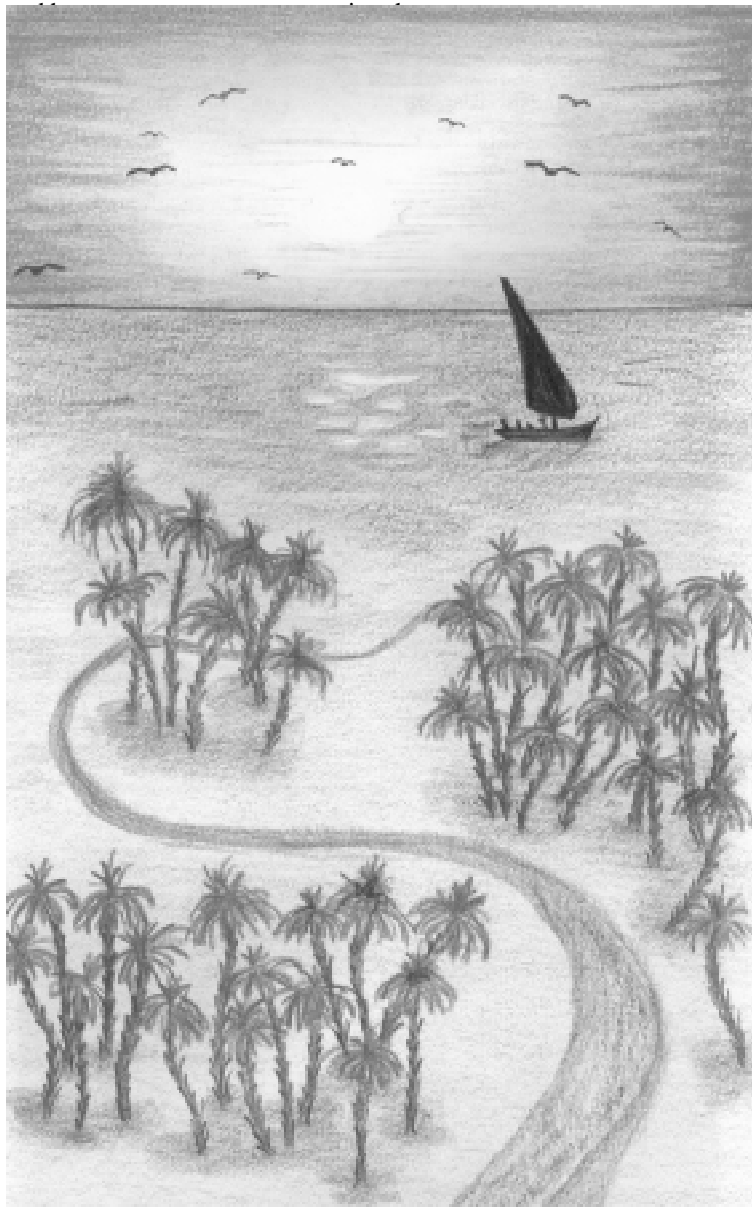
Simply put, the rest is history that you can probably tell me about.

Muslims Around the World

Even though all *Sunni* Muslims believe in the same principles, they are very disunited. Without a caliph, they are headless chickens going in every direction and often colliding together. It is impossible to get two groups to agree on leadership. There are four schools of thought in the *Sunni* Muslim methods: *Hanafi*, *Malki*, *Shafi*, and *Hanbali*. These are named after the great scholars who founded them. *Islam* is a fascinating religion with its detailed laws. One interesting aspect of the *Quran* is that some of its rules replace each other. The *Quran* states in verse 2:106, “Whatever verse we replace the ruling of or make you forget, we replace with a better one.” This is an interesting aspect of the *Quran*. Scholars debate why *Allah* left verses with replaced rulings in the *Quran* when He erased other verses. This is speculation, but a reasonable interpretation is that *Allah* wanted the original ruling, which is generally softer, to remain so that the weak of heart could use it as an excuse believing they are still obeying the *Quran*. However, whatever the cause, the fact remains that some verses in the *Quran* have suspended rulings. If this is true for the *Quran*, it must be true for the *Sunna*, the tradition of Prophet *Mohammed*, (peace be upon him). The four schools of thought (*Mazahib*) came to slightly different rulings on many issues. Most *sunnis* believe it is fine to follow any of these schools, to mix between the schools in a systematic way, or not to follow a school, provided one is following the *Quran* and the *Sunna*.

About two hundred years ago, *Sunnis* were so divided that each of the four schools of thought led the prayers facing one of the four faces of the *Ka'aba* in *Mecca*. This was also the case in the Jerusalem *Al-Aqsa* mosque, where different schools prayed separately. Through the work of the early *Wahhabis*, this was dropped and only one prayer is held in each mosque.

Even in Muslim countries, each city mosque is generally overwhelmed by a particular group of patrons or worshippers that whether the government approves or not, the mosque takes on the appearance of that group. In North America, *Sunni* Muslims in most cities are divided



The Second Round of Muslim Work

I was very pleased the community was able to cash on the shares I donated to it. The funds were used wisely to build an *Islamic* school that was home to over five hundred children, a mosque for the Friday prayers that housed at least eight hundred people, and a community center for our celebrations. I never interfered in the affairs of the community directly. *Rashed* came to me in 1999 when the Wi-LAN shares were on their meteoric rise and asked if I would support an initiative to start a youth center. I had not spent enough time with my kids because of business. The concept of saving youths was very appealing. I arranged for the funding of the project. It was one of the most rewarding initiatives I ever participated in. I heard from many people how it helped save them or their kids from going astray.

I had one regret. When my family's shares were worth around \$500 million, I did not cash out about \$100 million to do all the community projects we needed and desired. I was determined to keep working in Wi-LAN, waving my magic wand to have the shares back to their glory. I tried everything I knew, but it seemed of little significance. I put over one hundred percent of my energy into the business and family issues. With the company being the top priority, by July 2001, I had to instigate major layoffs that resulted in my returning to the president position, with the help of *Sisso* who was now the chief operating officer.

The events on September 11, 2001 caught me a little off-guard. I never expected a terrorist attack to be broadcast on national television or expected the US to be totally helpless in the face of nineteen individuals with box cutters. My early reaction was it was impossible for Muslims

to have coordinated something horrifying of this simplicity and magnitude. Also, there were and still are a lot of unanswered questions. Planes, to make it safely to runways, are aided with microwave landing systems for the last five miles or so before landing; who helped guide these planes?

How could trainee pilots navigate large planes and hit buildings while turning? My generation recalls the Microsoft flight simulator and how the pilot of a turning plane had a totally different perspective of the world. He would not have seen the World Trade Center in front of him. It would have been to the side on top of him somewhat. Why didn't the passengers that were using their cell phones from the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania mention the race of the hijackers? The obvious psychological answer is that they must have looked Caucasian.

As the days passed and more information came about, I was comfortable with the fact the Muslims could have executed the attack but had to assume there was some prior knowledge by the US intelligence services – that the event may have been allowed to happen in order to achieve the goals that we were seeing happen around the world in 2005. When one has a perfect crime where there are no witnesses, one has to look for the motives. Did the Muslims have a motive? If we looked back in 2005, did the Muslims gain from the attacks? The answer to both questions is a simple “No.”

In October, I received a phone call from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Canada's equivalent of the FBI. The caller said he wanted to chat with me about anti-American remarks I had made. I told him I did not recall such remarks but did not mind talking. I added I was busy, and he would have to come to my office. He insisted I needed to go to his office. I thought to myself, “I am not a suspect of anything, why should I be dragged from my busy schedule and go to a police office?” I told him I would need my lawyer present and would call him the following day with a time. I called my lawyer. He asked me, “Did you ever make anti-American remarks?” I said, “Nothing that would imply I want to do any harm to any American. I comment on US policy from a political side but never encouraging violence.” He told me, “Call them back and tell them that you never made anti-American remarks. If they had specifics, they could either detail them in advance and you will

respond or they can charge you.” I relayed this to the officer and he thanked me. I asked him, “Why are you doing this?” He said, “It is instructions from above.” I asked, “Do you enjoy calling good citizens and annoying them?” He said, “I do not agree with the policy of calling like this and accusing people without any foundation, but I have to do what I am told.” I thanked him for being candid.

I went to *Mecca* for a visit to the holy mosque. Part of the visit was to get clarity of thought and to meet other Muslims from around the world and get a sense of the mood in the Muslim community. I went for the last ten days of *Ramadan*. It was very good, since the fasting, combined with visiting the holy mosque, was the best spiritual purifier. On a particular night, the mosque went in a great roar with happiness. When I inquired about what made people so happy, I learnt they believed Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had died. I felt sorry that such a great nation thrived on rumors and was waiting for miracles to happen. On the last night there, I sat looking at the *Ka’aba*. As I sat there, I finally understood that I had been wasting my time by waiting for Wi-LAN to go back to the top. I learnt that I needed to put more of my spare time into the Muslim community in Calgary, like I did before Wi-LAN. I understood Wi-LAN was a great learning experience for me, but I needed to utilize this experience for a lasting cause, like community work.

I arrived in Calgary the night before *Eid-ul-Fitr*. The next morning, I headed to the Stampede Grounds, where we were holding the prayer for the few years prior. The Imam gave a moving speech about how the events of September 11 had polarized the world against the Muslims. It was good but negative. I got up during an intermission in the speech and told him people are desperate and need some good news. He should focus on the way out of the issues we were facing. I gave him a quick example. He told me to sit down. He got up and finished his speech. I went to him after the speech and asked him why he did not take my advice. He told me I did not show enough respect by talking to him in front of everyone. I got upset and told him that the Prophet himself accepted feedback while he was giving his speeches and modified what he was saying in response to public demands. He and I settled that we should meet some time later to discuss how to better give him input before the event. This was my first meeting with this Imam.

I called him the following day. When we met, I explained I believed that Muslim leaders needed to be more positive. I believed things would turn to the better for the whole world within a few years but that we needed to prepare our people for that eventuality and stop focusing on the negative issues in the world. He agreed he could modify his speeches to be more positive and asked for some inputs on some topics.

The biggest issue for Muslims from 2001 to 2005 was the appearance that they were under the total control of the whims of the US president. This is against what Muslims believe. Muslims believe that they have submitted to the will of *Allah* and that no man has power over them. This seems to be contradicted by the events in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. The US appeared to have almost unilaterally decided who was right and wrong and enforced its judgment. After September 11, the US demanded that Afghanistan hand over *Osama bin Laden* for trial in the US. Anyone in his right mind knew *bin Laden* would not get a fair trial in the US. The *Taliban* agreed to hand him over but to a neutral country, where he would get a fair trial. Evidence needed to be submitted and scrutinized by a defense lawyer. The US acted as if this was a ridiculous offer and went ahead taking Afghanistan back a few centuries and increasing the heroin traffic. *Allah* promised the Muslims victory in the *Quran*. Many ask, "Where is *Allah*'s promised victory?" They forget that *Allah* has a plan for the world that is unfolding in front of our own eyes. Some things had to happen before the ultimate victory. Also, Muslims were not ready to take the victory, even if it was within their grasp. I have to explain this more later.

The Imam gave a few speeches later about the reasons the victory will be delayed and that we should believe it is coming. We have to be more righteous before it comes. This was a good message that gave people something to do while they were waiting for the victory.

I understood three things: the first is that the promised victory is probably not a military one. The second is that the symptoms of this victory are that righteous people will rule the world and God's word will be the most respected. The third is that it is within reach.

For anyone who knows physics or electricity, there is a difference between the potential of a battery and the current it delivers. In comparing this with real life, the potential of a group of people is like that of a

battery. The actions of the group are like the current. In the Muslim community worldwide, the potential is the highest it has been in four hundred years. The problem is there is no visible good action. The movement of the groups seemed like random motion (for those who know physics – more like Brownian motion), each group going in its own direction, including those that are totally wrong and contrary to what the Prophet *Mohammed* taught – direction like *bin Laden*'s. If a Muslim leader were to appear and be respected by enough of these groups, the actions would be influenced into the same direction and would immediately be significant and visible.

I shared this point of view with a few people. First, it was my brother *Essam*. I told him I had a vision to lead the Muslim community worldwide. I told him I thought the trials of Wi-LAN's demise had taught me how to turn negative events into positive public relations opportunities and that I believed this concept was most lacking in the Muslim community. *Essam* told me, "Go for it." I then talked to *Rashed*. He said he would support me in any decision I made. I consulted with my brother *Ahmed*. He told me, "Why do you think you would succeed where others failed? Anyone wanting to do this needs to be very familiar with *Syed Qutb*'s book, 'In the Shade of the *Quran*.'" I talked briefly to my mom and she said, "*Hatim*, I always felt you had something special. This may be it." I finally talked to my sister, *Azza*, and she was excited as if I was already leading the Muslim world. Before we leave this juncture, I would like to say that since these early days, I have changed my views on my personal role and am very comfortable helping as much as I can. I know I am not going to be a leader of the Muslim world. I believe that I have to work hard to facilitate the emergence of such a leader.

The Muslim Council of Calgary, the MCC, which was set up in 1995 to unite the two main Muslim organizations in the city at the time: the Muslim Association of Calgary and the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary, was then run by a wonderful brother by the name *Najah Hage*. *Najah* was a shop owner and in the process of moving to a much bigger store. He was very busy with his business. This led to misunderstandings with some members of the community. *Najah* had invited a prominent Afghani lady to give a talk in the mosque. She was a liberal and did not wear a hijab. This led to a confrontation with the

stricter Muslims in the city. They conspired to hold a special general body meeting to remove him. *Rashed* learnt of this and alerted them that I might be available for the position. They came to talk to me. *Najah* also heard of the possibility and informed me he would be glad to step down during *Eid-ul-Adha* prayers. The group opposed to *Najah* accepted this peaceful compromise. During the next forty days, I joined the council as a regular member so that I could become chairman when *Najah* stepped down. The community conducted many meetings that ranged from five to fifty people to discuss the community's aspirations. When the *Eid* came, *Najah* told me he would not be stepping down since things had settled down. I went to the opposition group and told them not to cause any problems. My presence on the council ensured no unpopular decisions would be taken.

There was one year left in the MCC's two-year term. There were no major issues, and we did not meet too many times as a council. This eighteen-month delay between my plan to be more involved with the community and my becoming chairman of the council helped me understand one of the problems with the leaders of small Muslim groups: they each believe he is a good candidate to lead all the Muslims. This is the recipe for conflict and disaster. By then, I totally believed I was a volunteer that would do his best and give *bay-aa* or allegiance to the first candidate who was more qualified than myself. This was a very important change in my thinking.

In January 2003, I went for *Hajj* one more time. There was a lull in activities everywhere. The MCC elections were set for May, and the pilgrimage was in February. Business was cruising along. I wanted to feel the pulse of the Muslim *ummah*. In the last days before I was preparing to travel, the space shuttle Columbia was in space. Aboard was an Israeli astronaut, Ilan Ramon, who began his career as an air force pilot. In 1981, he had participated in the bombing of a nuclear facility in Iraq. On January 21, Ilan gave an interview from the shuttle, whereby he indicated he did not represent Israel but the entire Middle East. It was ironic that someone who participated in attacking a country hundreds of miles away would be representing that country and others of its like. The interview raised concerns amongst Arabs that Ilan's return would be used by Israel to humiliate the Arabs. He was a national hero

for attacking an Arab facility and now for being the first Israeli astronaut in space. When I woke up on February first, I went to check my news online. I was shocked to read about the shuttle going missing. I was glued to the computer, checking all sources of news and reading the first news reporting an explosion over Palestine, Texas. It was most ironic for an Israeli to die over Palestine. I mentioned this to all my family and friends that day. I thought it was just a simple message: an Israeli hero with some of Israel's aspirations died over Palestine.

By the time of the elections in May 2003, there were three main prayer areas in the city that were not under the supervision of the MCC. This was a concern. A mosque is more than a prayer hall for Muslims. It is a social place where people meet and discuss their affairs. A mosque under a separate leadership is the beginning of division. There was *Al-Fajr* Youth Center that *Rashed* was running. However, *Rashed* and I had an understanding that *Al-Fajr* would fold under the MCC as soon as a strong decisive MCC was elected. There was a new group emerging in the city that was mainly a *Neo-Salafi* group. *Salaf* means ancestor in Arabic. All Muslims should be *Salafis*; meaning should follow the method of the ancestors. *Neo-Salafis* monopolize the understanding of the methods of the ancestors. Many of its advisors were in the group that opposed *Najah* and nominated me for the chairmanship of the MCC. I had a small history with the group. Once it was founded in 2001, one of its founders asked me for financial assistance. I was very busy with Wi-LAN and, after visiting their offices, I recommended to the person that manages the charity I donate to, to go and check it out. I was favorable in my recommendation to him. He investigated and was concerned that the group had no intentions of working under the MCC. They wrote him a letter indicating they would not declare when *Ramadan* starts or when the *Eid* prayers were, and that for these, they would follow the MCC. I guess he was not content this was sufficient membership in the MCC and did not give them any funds. I was not fully aware of this.

No one else was nominated for the chairman position. There were thirteen nominees for the ten other director positions. I tried to arrange for three to step down so as to avoid elections but these efforts failed. The elections were on a Sunday. The Thursday before, I received an email from the head of the *Neo-Salafi* group informing me that though

we are independent organizations, they would like to cooperate closely with the new MCC as they did with the old one. He invited the MCC to a dinner and a tour of their facility as soon as the MCC was elected. I was aware that *Najah* tried numerous times to have them unite with the MCC, but that they had refused. The *Neo-Salafi* group hired an Imam a month before in April 2003. I replied to the email thanking him and indicated the new MCC would need to know each other before they knew other groups. I basically asked the Imam for some time. The secretary of the *Neo-Salafi* group was elected to the MCC. I asked him to introduce me to the *Neo-Salafi* group president on the eve of the elections. We met for the first time. I said we needed to forget about independence and unite with each other. He replied that his group might not be willing to go for a full unity. I asked him to check with them as to what changes they would require the MCC to make to itself so they join with it.

A week or so later, I heard from the *Neo-Salafi* group's president inviting the MCC to a dinner the following week. I accepted but later learnt that this was the date for a regularly scheduled MCC meeting. It was a public meeting. I begged his forgiveness and apologized we could not make it. Some time later, they invited some members to a meeting in their office. We chose four. We explained our objectives to each other. We discussed options of unity. They seemed adamant about not joining together and that we should let them be free to introduce *Islam* to Muslims and non-Muslims in our facilities. This posed a legal threat to us, given the uncertainties of the time. We begged them to consider unity one more time. They promised to consult with their board of trustees and get back to us. They did inform us they were not interested in full unity but would give us a letter acknowledging we are the political leadership of the community. They would not set the dates for *Ramadan* or *Eids*. We asked them to include that they would not open a mosque in the city without our permission. They refused. I asked their advisors, who had nominated me to the MCC, to intervene. They failed to convince them.

Towards the end of June 2003, I appealed to the *Neo-Salafi* group to accept the ruling of the *Quran* on our minor dispute. I suggested we invite two scholars of our choice and they invite two scholars of their choice. The four scholars would vouch that they would use the *Quran* as

their sole source of judging. We would both present our cases and ask them for a ruling. We would then go with the majority opinion. In *Islam*, this is called *Tahkeem-ul-Quran*. The *Quran* states that if one invites another to *Takheem-ul-Quran*, a hypocrite will delay and a disbeliever will refuse. After delays for two months, the *Neo-Salafi* group sent the MCC an email saying, "We hope to reach that stage some time in the future where we can think of sitting together and talking about grave matters like *Tahkeem-ul-Quran*." This finally convinced the other MCC members that the *Neo-Salafi* group was not interested in unity or in the immediate application of the rule of the *Quran*. The MCC concluded the *Neo-Salafi* group was content being separate from the community and they felt they were better Muslims than the rest of the community.

The problems with the *Neo-Salafi* group did not end there. Around April 2004, their preacher, through a misunderstanding about my intentions in sending him a message informing him about rumors in the city and the need to clarify them, gave a Friday speech in a downtown mosque, where he basically accused me of not being trustworthy, a liar, a cheater, a low-life, and many other cheap things. The MCC called for a meeting to investigate the matter and the rumors that led to it. The preacher did not come to the meeting. He later stated he was not invited, though the *Neo-Salafi* group was formally invited and its chairman and a trustee came to the meeting. We banned the preacher from speaking at facilities administered by the MCC. The *Neo-Salafi* group replied they would comply and that the *Neo-Salafi* group would not hold functions in our facilities. They did not know we were two weeks away from concluding agreements on three independent facilities, where Friday prayers were held, that would come under the umbrella of the MCC. Once this became public, the *Neo-Salafi* group complained to the community. A barrage of messages appeared on a chat-site sponsored, at the time, by the MCC. These messages accused me of having a hidden agenda and that I was really a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. I went online to explain myself, but it fell mostly on deaf ears. The sympathizers of the *Neo-Salafi* group were very vocal and often rude. One of them put a picture of Napoleon on the website and explained it was a picture of me. Though it is totally wrong to mock people in *Islam*, he stressed he was also referring to the fact that both Napoleon and I

were short. This was not the rudest comment, but it was a direct breach of *Islamic* protocol. In a later conversation with the preacher, I told him the more I read from his supporters, the more I was convinced that banning him was the right thing to do.

The MCC debated long and hard about the issue of the preacher's ban. Eventually, the whole council listened to a recording of the speech and concluded we were right to impose the ban. However, we gave him an opportunity to redeem himself. We agreed to allow him to talk at the same place he gave the original speech. He offered a generic apology that did not show the MCC he appreciated the magnitude of the abuse of the *Minber* (pulpit). The ban was lifted but with an understanding we would not invite him to talk again.

I am not always the best diplomat. I may have used unpolished language in the meetings with the *Neo-Salafi* group. I may have been forceful and pushy. I may have come across as someone loathing for power, control, and authority. I know that some people with weak spirits mischievously made the conflict bigger. I know the *Neo-Salafi* group trustees worried about the organization they put their energy and resources into building and what will happen to it if a weak MCC was to take over and to replace them with bad workers. I know they did good work. I am assuming that they all had good intentions. I know they meant well. I worried that they could do harm with good intentions. The sad thing about the events with the *Neo-Salafi* group is, ideologically, I feel very close to them. I believe in going back to the fundamental sources all the time. I believe that every intellectual person should be able to analyze the *Quran* and *Hadeeth* and come to a good conclusion.

Let me repeat my belief at this point. *Neo-Salafis* are armed with one verse from the *Quran* and one narration from Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) and want everybody to follow their interpretation of this verse and narration. It is like monopolizing religion. I also noticed *Islam* had all kinds of people in its spectrum. There were people that were so relaxed in their interpretation of the rules that they allowed the drinking of alcohol or the eating of pork, claiming the original prohibition was for life fourteen hundred years ago. They said things are different now. The other extreme includes people that believe each verse has one meaning and only one meaning and only they know that meaning. The

irony is that these two groups are almost the same. To show my point: a youth would be out all night drinking. When he arrived home, he would see his dad praying, asking God to guide his son to the straight path. The son would be so rude to his dad and almost beat him for daring to talk to him about his attitude. One day, the son meets a *Neo-Salafi*, who convinces him to read the *Quran* and interpret it for himself. The kid goes home and sees his dad praying. He still would be rude to him but explain to his dad that he is praying wrong.

The *Neo-Salafi* concept appeals to youth. It is in perfect harmony with their natural rebellion. The movement often involves Saudi nationals who have access to Saudi funds. This makes them often well financed.

With the issue of the *Neo-Salafi* group behind the MCC's back, we set off to do many of the objectives we set out to do. The *Eid* prayers were a great success. We attracted more and more people with each one. We distributed teddy bears and gift bags to the children. There was a concern that *Neo-Salafis* would object to the distribution and criticize it. As I approached one of them to inquire, I saw each of his two kids had a teddy bear, so I did not need to ask. We also set up blow-up games for the kids and had clowns to entertain them. There was a food bazaar. These activities restored the spirit of festivity to our *Eids*. Most Muslims had lost this spirit since they came to Canada. Canadian-born Muslims never knew the true spirit of celebration until we started it. In Muslim countries, *Eids* are big celebrations.

In September 2003, a member of the MCC insisted I check out a building that was for sale. It was ninety four thousand square feet and would be excellent as a mosque and a school. The group selling it was asking for \$7 million. It was not on the market yet. I did not want to entertain the idea if we could not raise the cash. The brother insisted. We called a meeting and discussed it. We called the broker and informed him that since the selling group was building a new facility, they probably did not need the cash in one lump sum. He agreed. We offered to pay them over nineteen months: one million dollars in two payments, three months apart, and the rest in nineteen months. We also asked to use an empty warehouse for some functions. We were surprised when they countered with the same structure but a slightly higher number. We had a deal at \$6.25 million but had our work set out for us. The community

had never raised this kind of money before. We held a general meeting to approve the transaction. We were lucky because it was *Ramadan* and Muslims are most generous in this month. We collected over \$1.2 million in two nights. However, things slowed down from that point onwards. Also, I donated about \$770,000 in Wi-LAN shares. Unfortunately, the shares went up a little but declined after that. We made the down payment but struggled collecting the rest. We applied for a grant from the *Islamic Development Bank* in *Jeddah*, Saudi. This was an interesting exercise.

They lost our application one time. A few months later, they visited the community on their way to Edmonton, thinking they never heard of the project. We applied again. We had to fill a formal application on the third round then get references from Canada, both civic and *Islamic*. Finally, we had to wait. At the eleventh hour, a few members of the community stepped in and loaned the community \$3 million. Some members launched an investment fund, and it loaned the community \$1 million. By way of a miracle, we raised the funds and closed the deal on July 1, 2005. The building was appraised for \$9.75 million the day we acquired it.

Al-Fajr Youth Center fulfilled its promise and joined the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary and has since moved its activities to the new *Islamic* center. The ladies were taking a more prominent role in the community. They worked on social initiatives. The Muslim Family Network Services worked to establish a Muslim food bank in Calgary and on a shelter for battered women. They have already done the groundwork for both initiatives, including a survey of the needs of Muslim families.

We included the Muslim community in Brooks, a city about one hundred and forty miles from the city within the Muslim Council of Calgary, which was a step towards making the council more involved in the affairs of Muslims in Southern Alberta. We also met with the Muslim community in Edmonton and had worked on setting up a Muslim council for the province of Alberta. We had minor disagreements about the authority of the Alberta council but it is slated to be up and running by 2006.

We developed a website for the community in July 2003. The community has had a late introduction into information technology. We first registered the web name www.muslimcouncil.net. The member of

the council that was the secretary of the *Neo-Salafi* group owned it. He assured us of his total loyalty to the MCC and the community. He renewed it in 2004 but not in 2005, leaving the community without its own site. We also funded the initial work for another site, www.calgarymuslims.com. This is the chat site the *Neo-Salafi* group supporters dominated. It is a community site that posts all community announcements, albeit not directly under the control of the MCC. Our current website is www.muslimsofcalgary.ca.

In 2003, I was nominated to the council of the *Islamic Society of North America*, an organization that overlooks more than two thirds of the mosques in the US and a few mosques in Canada through a set up trust. This was an excellent move for the community. It made sure we were closely aligned with ISNA. We also became aware of the issues and developments within the Muslim community at large. The head Imam in 2003 was the president of the *Islamic Circle of North America*. This assured us close cooperation with ICNA group as well. Finally, *Rashed* was a prominent member of the Muslim Association of Canada the Canadian affiliate of the Muslim American Society, the formal Muslim Brotherhood presence in the US. My close friendship with *Rashed* and other members of the Brotherhood ensured cooperation with MAS and MAC Canada. To complete the picture, I have to mention that through a business connection in Saudi, I became acquainted with some of the founders of the Council of American *Islamic Relations* (CAIR). CAIR is a great Muslim civil advocacy group. I personally believe they are the best in professionalism and in reach. I was able to share my thoughts about the public relations opportunity that the events of September 11 provided to the Muslim community. We should not be apologetic but rather use the opportunity to explain *Islam*. Of course, they had already thought of this and were well on their way implementing actions such as TV, newspaper, and magazine advertisements. When CAIR moved to Canada, some of the founders of CAIR-CAN lived in Calgary. This helped establish a wonderful relationship with them. In a local fundraising effort, they exceeded, in pledges, any amount raised anywhere else in Canada. However, my pledge to them was still outstanding in 2005. We have consulted with CAIR-CAN on a number of issues. In 2005, I stepped down from the ISNA executive council. I felt that, though they are a great group, they are mostly reactionary and do not take steps to avoid

future issues. I always want to be part of progressive groups that will impact the future, not clean up the past. However, the work ISNA is doing is very important for the community, and the organization is the best in its moderation and inclusiveness.

We recognized we needed much more public relations. We decided to issue press releases about our achievements, our aspirations, and concerns. This helped tremendously. Contrary to the general assumption by Muslims that Jewish groups control the media and will never publish good Muslim stories, we received more and more good press, particularly with the Calgary Herald. Two issues in particular got us some positive feedback: one was through an invitation to all Calgarians to donate to a Christmas fund for abused ladies. The other was a simple comment on an issue that was brewing in Calgary. Someone had complained the City of Calgary had a nativity scene paid for by the taxpayers. I was quoted in the paper saying, "If the scene makes someone happy and charitable, I am all for it. Multiculturalism is not about taking away the rights of the majority; it is about respecting the rights of the minorities."

Through being promptly available for the media, we were the first religious group to be quoted on national TV when the Canadian prime minister suggested Canada would pass a bill approving gay marriages. We were quick to point out that *Islam* does not approve of this. We will not perform such ceremonies. However, we did point out that this was a symptom of a much bigger problem – the decaying family values. We invited the government to do more to restore family values.

In the summer of 2004, we issued an anti-violence declaration that stated the undersigned were against violence of any sort to achieve political means. We included acts of war, terrorist attacks, beheadings, kidnappings, and suicide bombings in this list. We stated we believe every group should have the right to self-government and self-determination. We also stated we do not support any organization or group that commits violent acts and that our preachers will teach this message. We met with the Anglican Church in Calgary, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish Council of Calgary to promote this declaration, but none of them signed it. We had a follow up meeting with the Jewish Council in 2005 and asked them if they would be willing to sign the declaration as is. They expressed concern that it could be used for political reasons, and they were in no position to appear to be criticizing Israel.

We condemned the killing of the crippled *Shaikh Ahmad Yasin* of *Hamas*. He was killed in his wheelchair as he was leaving a mosque after the dawn prayer. An airplane fired a missile at him under the direct order of the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, who admitted watching the whole thing live on TV. We held a ceremony at the mosque in his memory. I reminded everybody that it was time to speak out. Muslims were so scrutinized after September 11 that they stopped raising political issues in fear of government reprisals. We agreed it was time to speak up against oppression everywhere.

In an article that appeared in the Herald about the MCC and the Muslim community in Calgary, we said we oppose the killing of any body. A Jewish person sent a letter to the editor to say I should have added, “unless they are Jewish” at the end of the quote. This was surprising and disturbing. I had been to Israel and learnt first-hand that we needed to stop the violence.

A new council was elected March 2005. This council is very active and is planning great things for Calgary’s Muslim community. It has in its first six months achieved more than any other council had achieved in the prior ten years. I attribute this to dedication of the individuals and the maturity of the council.

On August 3, 2005, I flew to Jerusalem from Toronto and spent a night in a hotel but actually spent most of the time in the mosque. I sat through a post-dawn lecture by the head Imam of *Al-Aqsa* mosque. He, at the end, asked the rhetoric question, “Why are there not more people praying in the mosque?” I wanted to answer, but he asked me to wait. At the end, he allowed me to express my views that the mosque should not only give religious lectures but also give more services. People will come for the services and eventually attend the religious lectures. He liked the answers and we were introduced. I spent most of the day with him and learned a lot about the suffering of the Palestinian people. We agreed to stay in close contact.

When I returned to Calgary on August 20, I was tired and slept early. I was awoken by the news that, *Akram Jomaa*, the head of the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary was electrocuted while working on renovations in the new building we acquired. I was immediately happy for him but very sad for us. I was happy that he had been martyred for such a wonderful cause. His death was a testimonial

to his good intentions and his sincerity. I was sad for us that were left here to struggle with daily issues. Ironically, earlier that day, a close friend told me, “The best decision you made was to appoint *Akram* as the head of the MCFC. I cannot think of anyone else in the community that can do the work he does. Actually, I cannot think of five people that can do the work he does.” When *Akram* was electrocuted, he shouted, “*Allahu Akbar; Allahu Akbar*,” or “God is greater; God is greater.” The person working with him pulled him away from the wires. He sat on a chair and breathed his last breath. It never ceases to amaze me how he remembered to say such beautiful words in such a situation. Many people would curse under lesser circumstances. I concluded it was *Allah’s* guidance that made him say those words. Now to perfect the story, *Akram* was one of the largest financial contributors to the project.

As per Muslim tradition, the funeral was held the following day. We never counted, but it must have been the biggest funeral ever in Calgary. The mosque was full two hours before the ceremony. We had to start eulogies, which are not traditional in *Islam*, and read *Quran* to break the somberness of the situation. When I spoke, I stated that I will witness on the Day of Judgment that *Akram* is a shaheed (martyr). The *Quran* taught us that Muslims will witness on other people. An example of this witness was Noah (peace be upon him) would have been asked by God, “Did you deliver your message?” He would reply, “Yes.” God would ask, “Do you have witnesses that you did?” Noah would look around, but all his people would deny he delivered any message to them. The Muslims would vouch for him. God would ask the Muslims, “How do you know he did?” Muslims would answer, “Because you said that he did in the *Quran*.”

The martyrdom of *Akram* was the top news in the Calgary Sun and a turning point for activism in the community. Everyone felt that if we would have volunteered more, maybe we could have prevented the death of *Akram*. Of course, Muslims believe that no action could have changed the outcome but that does not stop one from holding his share of the responsibility. When *Akram* died, there were only three people working in the building. The following week, there were over one hundred people volunteering. It is believed that this spirit of activism will continue.

Akram Jomaa will always be a symbol for the energy of the Muslim community in Calgary: A community that is united for the most part;

more united than any other Muslim community in the world.

Islam and the Christian West

“Say: O People of the Book (Jews and Christians) come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but God (Allah); that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God (Allah). If then they turn back, say: bear witness that we are Muslims, submitting to God’s (Allah’s) will.” Quran (3:64)

This chapter summarizes a lot of my observations about Western Christians. I had lived many summers as a university student with a German family that was half Catholic – half Protestant. Much of my experience is through recent acquaintances and friends in the Florida Panhandle; mostly from various Baptist churches. I have come to understand more about Christians than I did when I grew up in Egypt. I have a distinct feeling that Muslims and Christians are much closer to each other than both groups think. I think that a major part of the differences between both groups is due to the use of words to attempt to describe things that can never be properly described by words: matters of faith.

Islam and the Christian west appear at odds. *Islam* teaches through the *Quran* and the *Sunna*, the tradition of Prophet *Mohammed*, that it is the last message from *Allah*, the one God of Abraham and Moses of the Old Testament. The *Quran* wonderfully states in 3:85: “If anyone desires a religion other than *Islam* (submission to *Allah*), never will it be accepted of him.” This does not say that *Islam* is the only way to salvation.

The Messiah Jesus is quoted in the New Testament to have said (John 14:6): “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This verse is somewhat confusing. Where do Muslims stand? Most Christians, without knowing *Islam*, assume because Muslims refuse that Jesus was God’s son, Muslims are disbelievers.

We learn from Biblical and *Quran* stories that God formed Adam

with God's own hands from earth (clay or mud). Stories have it that God blew in Adam from God's own Soul and that the soul entered Adam's body from the nose and life spread in his head first then in the rest of his body. According to this narration, Adam knew beyond doubt that he was created. Adam believed in God and taught God's commandments to his children. Adam carried religion down to earth with him from Eden. Adam believed and narrated the story of his own creation. However, as time passed and the generations got further away from Adam, the impact of the story of creation was lost, and many doubted and became disbelievers.

Noah came and warned his people that unless they cleaned up their act, God will destroy them. They did not heed his advice, and God destroyed them. For generations, Noah's descendants must have narrated this story and believed.

God performed many miracles of varying magnitude through other prophets, but we can say there was one common trend: miracles were getting less spectacular from the physical point of view as man was becoming more developed. The early miracles were more visual. The latter miracles were more intellectual. Moses' miracles were magical. Jesus' miracles were mostly medical (raising the dead and healing the sick). *Mohammed's* everlasting miracle is the *Quran*. The *Quran* carries many miracles in it, challenging modern day readers to find fault in it or to discover all its miracles. One of the miracles of the *Quran* is that *Allah* promised to preserve it. I have a personal experience with this preservation; where I caught typos in two different prints of the *Quran*. In any case, the *Quran* is a living challenge to all intellectuals to read it and comprehend it.

Westerners need to appreciate that Muslims believe the *Quran* is God's final accurate word. This makes Muslims believe in absolute truth. If it is in the *Quran*, there is room for interpretation but no interpretation should contradict the apparent meaning of the words. Christians, on the other hand, tend to look for underlying truth and allow for differences in the details. Christianity appears to be more relative dividing life on earth between God and the state with a clear separation between the two.

To further understand what *Islam* says about Jesus, we have to visualize the picture of Arabia when *Mohammed* was born. Arabs in the sixth and early seventh centuries were idol worshippers. They had over

three hundred and sixty idols constructed on and around the *Ka'aba* in *Mecca*. They used to bury their daughters alive when they were born, in fear of shame. They used to treat women as objects; as such, men sometimes inherited their fathers' wives. People still believed the *Ka'aba* was a holy structure, but they used to go around it naked. In this background, *Mohammed* elevated the status of women to being man's equal, with their good deeds rewarded with heaven. *Islam* forbade the killing of daughters. It forbade marrying the father's wives. It definitely forbade idol worshipping.

Mohammed, towards the end of his life, told his wife Aisha, "If not for the fact that your people are recent Muslims, I would have liked to rebuild the *Ka'aba* on the original foundations of *Ibrahim*." This shows his sensitivity to the fragility of the belief of the people of *Mecca* after he regained control of it. If we extrapolate this concept, we could see that *Mohammed* did not explain more about the status of Jesus, so that the early Muslims did not idolize him like the Christians did. The *Quran* illustrates this further. Every time the *Quran* quotes Jesus, it ends with a confirmation that God is one and that no one else is worthy of worship.

When the *Quran* talked about Jesus, it said he was born miraculously; that an angel blew his soul into the virgin *Mariam* (Mary). The *Quran* says Jesus is God's word and miracle. It also says he was a prophet of the most powerful prophets. It says he raised the dead; he blew in clay that he shaped like a bird, and it became a flying bird. He told people what they stored in secret; he was blessed; he cured the blind and the leprous. *Mohammed* said Jesus was God's Word and Spirit. The *Quran* and *Mohammed* both say that Jesus is not God's son. However, it does say that no one else is either. In Christianity, all Israelites and believers are God's children. This is something *Islam* nullified. Muslims are forbidden to use this language and equate it to associating partners with God. *Islam* stated we are but God's creation, and it is not proper to call a creature, a child. Muslims believe that they are God's servants on earth. We are to do what we are told by our Master and enjoy doing it.

The question then is what is the difference between Muslim belief and Christian belief if it is not in who Jesus is? The differences lie in a few places. *Islamic* law, for the most part, is a clarification and a

simplification of the Jewish law of the Old Testament. Christians take Jesus' statement (John 8:7): "So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" to mean that he abolished Moses' Law. Jesus clearly stated (Matthew 5:17): "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." This is a clearer statement that Jesus completed Moses' Law and was not sent to destroy it. Another difference is that some Christians believe they can be saved through their faith alone. This is a matter of controversy in the New Testament. James (2:26) wrote, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Paul wrote in Romans (3:28), "Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Muslims believe if someone believes in *Allah*, they are saved from eternity in hell. However, to be saved from hell altogether requires good deeds. To be fair, Catholics believe in the importance of works (good deeds). It can be said that when Martin Luther broke away from the Catholic Church, it was because he believed the Church focused on works and ignored faith. In 1999, a declaration by Lutheran and Catholic Churches seemed to bridge this chasm in that both groups now declare that faith and works are equally important. Muslims explain this best through the saying of Mohammed, "Belief – faith – sits in the heart but is manifested by the organs."

Perhaps the biggest difference between Muslims and Christians is in the Crucifixion. Christians believe the following version of history: Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus and led the multitudes of Jews to him. The Jews captured Jesus and handed him to the Romans, who crucified him. Jesus died on the cross. He was buried behind a big boulder. However, he appeared alive three days later and was raised to the sky.

Now, I beg the reader to humor me and assume that *Mohammed* is the first Prophet with a new revelation to come after these events. What would be one of the first things this Prophet explains? Of course, what happened to the closest messenger to him: Jesus. *Mohammed* explained that as Jesus prayed to be saved from the crucifixion (Matthew 26:39: "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."), God granted him his wish. God allowed him to ask a disciple to replace him if the disciple accepted. When Judas entered

Simon's house, he told the multitudes of Jews, "I have sold him for forty pieces of silver, but I do believe he has super powers. Let me go in alone and follow me afterwards and take the man that I am hugging." With this Judas went in. Jesus immediately told him, "Why did you betray me?" Judas was frozen, for he had not expected that Jesus would have known so quickly. Jesus then let Judas hug the disciple that volunteered to replace him. The *Quran* says (4:157): "They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them." *Mohammed* also implied that Jesus was too dear to God to be crucified by disbelievers. Crucifixion is a big issue to the Christians that believe faith suffices to save one from damnation. However, if a Christian believes that good deeds are needed besides faith, what is the true value of Crucifixion?

It is important for Muslims to understand that Christians believe in Crucifixion as a matter of history. Muslims believe it did not happen as a matter of faith. Christians are not wrong because they believe what was narrated to them. Muslims believe the *Quran*. It is best not to argue whose version of the truth is the correct one. The difference is not fundamental to the faith, provided Christians believe that "faith without actions is dead."

However, let's investigate the similarities between the two religions. Both believe we came to earth via creation and that we started in paradise and lost it because of a sin whereby we ate a forbidden fruit. We believe Satan tempted Adam to eat the fruit. We believe Cain killed Abel. We believe the world became corrupted by the time of Noah. So bad, in fact, that God drowned the entire world except for those who rode Noah's ark. We believe Abraham is the Patriarch of Prophets and was a great man. We believe he had two wives: Sarah and Hagar. He had Ismail from Hagar and Isaac from Sarah. Ismail and his mother were left in *Mecca*, and Hagar worried about her infant. God saved them with a well that flowed between the infant's legs. We believe Isaac was a prophet, and after him, Jacob and Joseph. Joseph was sold to the Egyptians after his brothers left him in a well. Joseph became high in the court of the Pharaoh. Joseph's shirt cured the blindness of Jacob. We believe the Pharaohs were mostly unjust and enslaved the sons of Jacob, Israel. The Israelites were promised to return to Palestine, the Promised Land. Moses talked to God near the burning bush on Mount *Sinai*. God sent Moses to

free the Israelites. The Pharaoh refused. Moses fled with the Israelites after they borrowed the jewellery from the Egyptians. Moses split the Gulf of Suez in the northern part of the Red Sea with his staff. The Israelites worshipped a gold bull. God punished them to stay in *Sinai* for forty years (one generation). Moses received the Torah from God, as well as tablets with the Ten Commandments. Moses died before the forty years ended and was buried in an unknown grave near the temple in Jerusalem. Joshua led the Israelites into Jerusalem. Saul became king and wanted to fight the giants. Saul brought the Ark of the Covenant. David killed Goliath and became king and prophet. David sang wonderful songs, the Psalms. Solomon built the temple. The Jews were enslaved and sent around the world. The Jews returned to Palestine. Jesus is the Messiah and was born to a virgin mother. Jesus is God's Word and Spirit. And most importantly, Jesus will come back at the End of Times to establish a fair and just kingdom ruled by the words of God. Then Jesus and the believers will return to God, and the world will be plagued with mischief until the world is destroyed on Judgment Day.

If one looks at this list of commonalities between the two religions, one is shocked by how long it is and how scholars from both religions focus on the differences and not the common points.

So why do Muslims and Christians not agree on religious matters? The secret answer to this question lies in politics more than in religion.

Unfortunately, politics is the reason for disagreement in both camps. Muslims try to interpret the verse from the *Quran* about no religion other than *Islam* will be accepted from someone who seeks it, forgetting that the verse is really implying that once someone knows *Islam*, they are not allowed to move away from it. It is not saying that people who do not know *Islam* from inside are doomed. As a matter of fact, verse (2:62) says it clearest: "Those who believe (in the *Quran*), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in *Allah* and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." Christians have, from the beginning, denied that *Mohammed* is a prophet. This is interesting because in trying to aid followers identify prophets, Jesus said (1John 4:2): "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come

in the flesh is of God.” *Mohammed* definitely confessed that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This means that *Mohammed* is of God. Muslim history has it that the Byzantine Emperor met with a messenger from *Mohammed* and then asked people from *Mecca* about *Mohammed*, originally concluding *Mohammed* was a Prophet but later recanting, fearing the rage of his advisors.

Regardless of what happened fourteen hundred years ago, it is time for intellectuals to review the record. Is *Mohammed* a prophet? We need first to know what a prophet is before we answer this question. In Hebrew, English, and Arabic, the word prophet is derived from the word “prophesy.” This implies a prophet prophesies. Well, we have lots of people who prophesy; what makes a prophet special? Two things: they prophesy unpredictable events, and their prophecies come true. Any person can predict with great accuracy when the sun will rise the following day. Meteorologists try to predict the weather and do a decent job (most of the time). Psychologists, based on studying a character, can predict the way it will react to certain impulses. All these are based on prior knowledge and experiences. Prophets prophesy unexpected unpredictable events.

During his migration from *Mecca* to *Medina*, a bounty hunter chased *Mohammed*. When the bounty hunter got too close to him, his horse sank in the sand. This was repeated three times. Witnessing this unusual event, the man saw that *Mohammed* was a prophet sent by God. *Mohammed* promised him he would wear the bracelet of *Kesra*, the king of Persia. How could a man fleeing from his hometown tell the bounty hunter chasing him such a prediction? Sure enough, within twenty years, Persia fell to the Muslims. As the spoils of wars were distributed, the bounty hunter received the bracelet of the king. This is a small example of a prophecy that was fulfilled long ago.

When we check the sayings of *Mohammed* with regards to the future, we see that most of them had come true with a great accuracy. I say most because some are yet to happen. *Mohammed* was once asked about the timing of the Day of Judgment. He replied, “The asked person does not know more than the person asking.” He was then asked about its signs. He replied, “The barefoot naked shepherds of Arabia compete in the height of their buildings, and the maid delivers her mistress.” We saw

the Arabs competing in high-risers. We do not fully understand the second sign yet. *Mohammed* had predicted a fire in *Medina* that would be seen in Bosra in southern Syria. This happened when a volcano erupted in 1257 in *Medina*. *Mohammed* predicted that Constantinople would fall to the Muslims and that the leader of the army would surprise all. Constantinople fell to Mehmet II in 1453. Mehmet was twenty years old when he captured Constantinople, thus ending the Byzantine Empire. *Mohammed* predicted the non-Arabs would subject Iraq to an embargo. This embargo would be so severe that Iraq would not be able to import enough wheat for a loaf of bread nor the worth of a silver coin. I guess the 1991 Security Council resolution was the beginning of that period. *Mohammed* predicted the Romans would subject Syria to a lesser embargo and then Egypt. It is interesting to note that various narrations of the *hadeeth* mention Iraq; fewer mention Syria and only one mentions Egypt. Though scholars have not entertained this view, it is possible that the frequency of the narrations relates to the frequency of the incidents of embargo. Iraq had been subjected to many embargos and seizures over the centuries. Syria had been subjected to less. Egypt has never been subjected to any yet.

Mohammed predicted many things through the *Quran*. In 30:2-3 the Persians defeated the Romans at the lowest spot on earth (by the Dead Sea) before the news of the 614 AD incident ever reached *Mecca*. Knowing the disbelievers of Arabia would rejoice at the news of another group of disbelievers (Persians), defeatings another group of believers (Romans), the *Quran* quickly announced (30:4) the Romans would be victorious over the Persians in a few years. This prophecy was fulfilled in 627 AD. The Byzantine Emperor Heraklios defeated the Persians conclusively. On a scientific note, that the same verses contained a scientific fact (the Dead Sea being the lowest spot on earth), *Mohammed* would have had no way of knowing this. This fact only became known recently.

The list of the prophecies of *Mohammed* that have come true is too long to be enumerated in any article or chapter of a book.

In short, *Mohammed* was a prophet.

A question arises: how did *Mohammed* get his ability to accurately prophesize? Muslims believe he never talked in vain and that all his

words were inspired (*Quran* 53:1-18). What do Christians who know of his prophecies say? Well, Machiavelli considered *Mohammed* part of a group that formed the Anti-Christ. This is a theory that does not hold. The Anti-Christ will come shortly before the End of Times. This theory has been around fourteen hundred years since the death of *Mohammed*. Sorry Machiavelli. You were wrong. Some, of antiquity, had the view *Mohammed* was a false prophet. This assertion would be against the words of Jesus I quoted earlier. *Mohammed* preached, "Jesus came in the flesh." This means *Mohammed* was "of God."

I am going to add one more possibility. Maybe demonic forces guided *Mohammed*. Muslim stories tell that he used to have convulsions when the Archangel Gabriel visited him. Maybe he was possessed by demons. To answer this, we ask the same questions the Emperor Heraklios asked about *Mohammed* of the non-Muslim Arab traders he summoned. "How is his family?" They replied, "Noble." He asked, "Does anyone else in Arabia say what he says?" They replied, "No." He asked, "Is one of his fathers a king?" They replied, "No." He asked, "Who follows him? The higher or lower classes?" They replied, "The lower classes." He asked, "Do they increase or decrease?" They replied, "They increase." "Does anyone who follows him revert back from *Islam* in discontent?" They said, "No." He asked, "What does he preach?" They answered, "To worship one God and not to associate idols with him; to pray; to be good; to be truthful; to be chaste; and to be content." He asked, "Do you fight him? Who wins?" They said, "We fight him, and we sometimes win and sometimes lose." Heraklios concluded, "These are all the signs of prophethood: he is noble but is not after a throne that he lost; the weak follow him. They always are first to follow prophets; they do not leave him; they grow in numbers. He preaches what all prophets preach. I knew a prophet was coming but did not think that he would come in Arabia." There was more to this story. The point I am trying to make is: does someone possessed with demons preach the worshipping of one God, praying, not lying, to be chaste, to visit the sick, and to take care of the elderly and the relatives?

This leaves us with the conclusion that *Mohammed* was a prophet from God. He received inspiration and revelations from Gabriel the Archangel.

However, before I proceed, I need to explain that I believe most

Muslims are wrong in a few issues. They believe that early Christians lied about the Crucifixion. They do not understand they witnessed what they saw. Also, Muslims like to focus on the fact Jesus, the son of Mary, was a descendant of Adam or a son of Adam. They ignore the *Quran*'s and *Mohammed*'s statement that Jesus is God's Word and Spirit. Muslims, at this time and age, need to be more sensitive in their approach to Christians. They need to understand more about how Christians believe and even more about what *Islam* really says about Jesus and Christianity.

On the issue of the political struggle between *Islam* and Christianity, early Christian monarchs facing the Muslims would have lost their political control over their subjects if they became Muslims. *Islam* taught equality, brotherhood, and freedom. Even though these were known concepts in Rome, they were alien in the wider Roman Empire. The Romans and Persians treated their colonies as slaves and objects. Also, *Islam* was a world religion, inviting all to become Muslim. Christians believed they had a world religion. They were not active in inviting others to Christianity at the time. Unfortunately, the king of Egypt and the emperor of Byzantine failed to become Muslims or to enter into a meaningful dialogue. Shortly after the conversation Heraklios had with the visiting Arab traders, he consulted with his advisors. They agreed to denounce *Islam*, even though he originally preferred adopting *Islam*. The Romans planned to attack *Medina* and end *Mohammed*'s reign over Arabia, so he did not convert more into *Islam*. *Mohammed* learned of their plan and sent an army that fought the Roman army in Mo'ata in Jordan. It was an indecisive battle. More battles ensued based on hostilities and eventually, the Muslims captured all the land of Byzantine Empire, including the capital, Constantinople, in 1453. Such a history does not leave much room for love and understanding.

Early Muslims were great conquerors, and in all senses of the word, great. They conquered many empires and lands at lightening speeds. This was not only because they were great warriors, but also because they spread the message of equality, brotherhood, and freedom. Most of the known world was occupied, at the time, with no concept of equality between the conqueror and the conquered. The people of the lands invariably helped the Muslims replace the occupying army. They had a chance to join the ruling Muslims just by converting to *Islam*. There are

many other reasons for the Muslims' initial rapid success; but these two factors are probably the most significant.

What modern Muslims do not appreciate is that later Muslims, the Ottoman Empire being an example, did not adhere to the Muslim principles as much as the early Muslims. When they conquered Christian lands, they converted churches into mosques, which is totally forbidden in *Islam*. When the *Umayyad* family wanted to convert the *Umayyad* church in Damascus into a mosque after sharing it with the Christians for some time, they negotiated a fair trade and gave them a much better place as a church. We know that Mehmet II, who captured Constantinople, did offer the Byzantine emperor a period, whereby he could have entered into a peaceful surrender agreement that would have protected the lives and belonging of all inhabitants. This offer was rejected. We are not sure the same proper etiquette was extended to other cities in Europe later on.

To Muslims, I say *Islam* is a perfect religion, but unfortunately, it has not been properly applied on any national scale since the *Umayyad* Caliph, Omar bin *Abdul Aziz*.

What modern Westerners do not appreciate is that the Europeans were very uncomplimentary to the Muslims. The inquisition began immediately, as Spain was regained from the Muslims. Spain was regained by force and agreements that were not honored. Muslims were persecuted through the Inquisition. (The Inquisition was a tribunal created by the mediaeval Christian Church to prosecute heresy. Papal inquisitors were given the power to torture and punish those whose activities were deemed to threaten political and religious unity. The Spanish Inquisition was notably the most notorious.) The prime question in the Inquisition was "Who was Jesus?" Any answer other than the official Catholic answer assured the person expulsion or a one-way ticket to the gallows. There are stories about how priests tricked Muslim girls into slavery. From there, the Europeans went on to conquer practically all Muslim lands. The Europeans did not spread true civilization in the countries they occupied. They tried to make those countries totally dependent on them. Did the British share their industrialization with any of their colonies? Did the French really share their wealth with Algeria? Did the British

open a single university themselves in Egypt?

I am not saying this to be bitter or spread hatred or bad feelings. We, Muslims and Christians, need to understand that we both made mistakes in the past. We both were not perfect in applying the faiths we have.

Muslims need to stop thinking all Christians will go to hell. Christians need to stop thinking that all Muslims will go to hell. They both need to understand that God (*Allah*) is a fair God. He will not make any believer lose an atom of good deeds that they did. We, Muslims and Christians, need to be objective about each other and treat each person as an individual. We should not judge about matters of heaven and hell. This *Allah* (God) has reserved for Himself.

Business Practices

The most important business practice I learnt is to honor one's employees and to genuinely think of them as partners in the struggle and not merely as subordinates that one has to direct. Running a business should be like steering a car: you do very little of it and you rarely have to make sharp turns. The more you know about the road ahead, the fewer sharp turns you will end up having to make.

Before we hired any employees for Wi-LAN, we developed a policy manual before we knew what employees we would have. This was a good exercise. It helped us develop the policies independent of any special feelings for individual employees. The manual was objective and clear. I studied the labor code to ensure that the implemented policies were fair as well as legally enforceable in the event there were any problems.

When we created Wi-LAN Inc., Fred Rogers was president. He was a charming guy that always told great stories. Our first cash came from a loan from our third partner, Michel Fattouche, who, against my advice, mortgaged his house to provide us with the capital we required. Michel informed us the mortgage was all the personal financial commitment he was willing to make. Fred, who was a bit of a mentor to me, had given me strict business advice to separate business from personal affairs; therefore, I refrained from using my line of credit. Delays in receiving the mortgage funds led us to not have enough cash for the first pay period. Fred and I strategized. Fred clearly said he would not bring in personal cash. His solution was to give the employees an "IOU" explaining what had happened. I told Fred, "These employees worked for me. I was their boss. On payday, I have to pay them. This is the kind of contract we have." He told me I would have to do it myself if I wanted it done. On January 28 or so, I received my last paycheck from the

telephone company, and to my surprise, it was appreciably larger than I thought because of vacation and other items. It was exactly enough to pay all my employees, however. I came home to my wife on payday and told her, "The good news is that we all got paid; the bad news is it all came from our personal account." From that first pay period, I never missed a payment to an employee.

The second business practice I learned was honesty. I believe I was always honest with the stakeholders: shareholders, employees, suppliers, partners, and customers. I promised, through the distribution of a business plan, the initial shareholders who gave Wi-LAN \$10,000 for each of the original one thousand shares, that we would not have more than one thousand original shares when Wi-LAN was fully financed or had gone public. To achieve this, Michel and I had to regularly return portions of the founders' shares we received for our initial work and for the transfer of our technology to Wi-LAN. We considered Wi-LAN fully financed sometime in early 1997, when we received a \$3,000,000 investment. At that point, Michel and my group owned about forty percent of the company each. We had to sell shares at some point for around \$5,000. To compensate the initial shareholders, contrary to the advice of some directors, who insisted these shareholders were "big boys" that knew shares appreciate and depreciate, we decided to issue preferred redeemable shares to those who paid more than \$5,000 in the middle of 1995. They were redeemable by the company within five years.

In 1993, we decided to start a new company, Wi-Com Technologies Inc., to place other technologies developed by Michel and me. In April 1995, we realized a cellular telephone location tracking technology that we developed was becoming desirable, as the Federal Communications Commission was planning on passing a rule that all cellular providers must be able to locate cellular telephones to within one hundred meters. We incorporated Cell-Loc Inc. as a subsidiary of Wi-Com. Cell-Loc used Wi-LAN's high-speed wireless modem, the Hopper Plus™, as its initial hardware. We also rented space from Wi-LAN. For this, we offered Wi-LAN twenty percent of Cell-Loc. To raise money to finance the operations of Cell-Loc, we offered shares of Wi-Com to Wi-LAN's employees and to some of the earliest shareholders of Wi-LAN. We sold the shares in Wi-Com at \$3,000 per each of the one hundred original

shares. Most bought fractions of shares. Wi-Com loaned funds to Cell-Loc. To everyone I sold the shares to, I made the statement, “You understand this is throw-away money; I do not want you to come and bother me about progress or anything like that. I will take parts of this company public sooner than Wi-LAN, and it is all for fun.” When Cell-Loc went public at \$0.40 per share, Wi-Com received about eight million shares for its approximate eighty percent ownership. This meant the original shareholders of Wi-Com received about \$3.2 million worth of shares. However, these shares were in escrow and were to be time released from 1998 until 2001.

In 1996, Wi-Com was developing another technology for speech compression. We hired a consultant to do some work. It was very promising, but neither Michel nor I had the time to manage the project. It never went anywhere.

In the early Wi-LAN days, a representative of our biggest supplier of components called me to say she was at the door to pick up a check. I told her I did not have the money to pay her and asked what gave her the impression she was going to get paid that day. She told me her accountant told her, “*Hatim* said the check is ready.” I told her I did not. The company fired that accountant. I built a relationship with my suppliers based on trust and honesty. I never lied to them about when they would be paid. I often told them, “I am sorry I am late. I will pay you. I do not know when. I need more components.” They often gave me more credit.

As for the customers of Wi-LAN, I took the “customer is always right” to a higher level but also understood its limits. We finished the Hopper™ Wireless modem in the summer of 1994 and decided to sell the first ten units of it to select customers like a large utility, an army unit, etc. We gave an unconditional thirty-day money back guarantee. About six months after we shipped the units, we got two back from one customer with a letter requesting the refund. We checked the units and one was bent. For units made from cast aluminum, to be bent meant they were hit with something like a sledgehammer. I sent them the refund. For years afterwards, this company was buying units from us without our representatives calling on them. When asked about the reason, they replied, “Someone in your company did something right a long time ago.”

Around October 1993, we entered into negotiations with a US firm to help finance Wi-LAN. The US firm was an interesting business that had invested in many technology companies with a number of good successes. It invested in another company, which had laser-based products that could transmit data almost at fiber optic speeds but for short ranges and was affected by weather. The US firm wanted to merge Wi-LAN with the laser-based products company and another company in the infrared communications business, believing this would generate a wireless communications powerhouse. Don Gibbs, who ran Mitel in the last days before it was sold, led the effort on the US firm's behalf. Don was an interesting person who taught me a lot. Don explained that Michel Fattouche, who acted more as the technical wizard, would eventually get tired of his silent role and get in my way. I planned to start a second company that Michel would run when this day came.

Don's remark made me think that often protégé followers, such as keen Ph.D. students or vice presidents in larger corporations, mostly start with a strange fascination for their supervisor. Slowly, they learn more of the tricks of the trade and begin to understand most of what the supervisor does. Eventually, the fascination is gone, and they become critical of their supervisor's work. If the supervisor is not ready with a plan to accept the protégé's criticism in the healthiest way, the relationship becomes ugly and unproductive.

As the public market slowed towards the end of 1993 and the beginning of 1994, the US firm lost interest in the idea. We tried to keep the interest alive by working hard to demonstrate our WOFDM prototype. We had a demonstration planned in the laboratory for a few of the consultants of the US firm. Everything went wrong. We executed the planned demonstration hundreds of times without any prior glitches. However, in front of these guests, errors crept in, and we could not figure out why. Another investor who invested \$20,000 in Wi-LAN was also visiting that day and observed the demonstration. He commented about the speed of the file transfer from one computer to another wirelessly by saying, "It would have been faster to copy the file to a desk and move it that way." However, as he finished his sentence, he handed me a \$15,000 check for more shares in the company. Such was the faith of Wi-LAN's early private investors, the Wi-LAN Angels.

We received a lot of money from Wi-LAN Angel Investors. They probably gave us about \$1.5 million by the end of 1994. The first were employees. Two employees put in about \$20,000 each from their registered retirement funds. Next were Michel and Anne Fattouche's families and friends. My family and friends stepped in later in September 1993. Michel and Anne baited the Angel. The Angel would then come to Wi-LAN and hear my spin of the story and mostly buy a share or two. They were wonderful people who always believed. One or two grew disgruntled with the amount of time it took to go public and demanded we buy them out. We often did by finding another buyer for the shares or buying them ourselves.

After the failed demonstration in 1994, we were very distraught. Michel and I felt greatly obligated to the shareholders. Michel came to me confidentially in the spring of 1994 and told me, "*Hatim*, I am so worried about Wi-LAN's survival. I am offering you to take all my shares and use them to stabilize the company in any way you can." I told him, "Michel, keep your shares. I am going to do everything anyways." Michel did not come to Wi-LAN for a while after that, except when asked to. He said it depressed him to hear all the negative news.

At the end of 1994, we received a visit from someone from the Alberta government who introduced us to a Korean investor. This investor was very intelligent and knowledgeable and had been a professor of management in a Canadian university who eventually left to manage an investment fund.

He bargained hard and eventually bought seven percent of Wi-LAN for \$700,000, but for various reasons, he wanted to put half the money as a direct investment and the other half as a consulting contract. We gave him seven percent of Wi-Com for free. He wanted to make sure he owned a piece of everything Michel and I did. We had a good relationship and were tirelessly trying to sell products/technology to Korean companies. It did not work out very well. I cannot tell what happened on his side. One can speculate that our WOFDM development was slower than he hoped, and this frustrated him. At some point, he stopped talking directly to me and instead had his executives deal with me. There was a misunderstanding regarding the \$350,000 consulting fee, and they refused to pay it. We entered into a one-page letter agreement modifying the

original investment agreement to facilitate the payment of the amount. They still did not pay it. They had acquired exclusivity to the Asian market. We threatened that without payment we would have to start selling to the Asian market. They sued us. We had a long process of productions of documents: thousands of documents and multiple examinations of discoveries.

Eventually, we got to court in September 1996. It took but twenty minutes. The judge asked after the opposing lawyer made his opening argument, “Do you mean you are trying to prove that the word “additionally” in the letter agreement does not mean your client had to pay another \$350,000?” He consulted with his client and told her, “Your honor, please give us half an hour to propose a settlement.” They basically folded, which meant they accepted they had no case. Their case was thrown out, and we were awarded costs. The judge agreed we would go into court that same afternoon for our case for damages. I learnt a valuable lesson in court. When you sue for damages, you have to list all causes of potential damage. If you do not, you are not entitled to add them in later. With a poorly written claim for damages, we had to drop the damages case and drop our claim to costs for the main case. I always thought to myself, it was bad for an investor to sue a company he was investing in. I concluded after the case that it is even worse to lose a lawsuit to the company one is investing in. A few weeks after the end of the case, we learnt the investor wanted out. We agreed to buy his interest in Wi-LAN and Wi-Com for the original \$350,000 he paid through monthly payments of \$50,000. We basically got shares back at \$5,000, when we were selling them for \$15,000 or so, not to mention the value of the Cell-Loc shares.

Shortly after the jubilations of winning the suit and getting rid of its nuisance investor, I heard my assistant, Kim Lickman, who joined Wi-LAN as a receptionist in December 1995 and who threatened to publish her own sequel to this book if I did not write nice things about her, on the phone telling someone, “Founder? I do not know who the founder of Wi-LAN is.” I said in a voice loud enough for her to hear me, “He wants to talk to me.” She put him through. The man, whom we will call the Investor, was a phenomenal character that comes only in fairy tales. He knew everybody in the telecommunications business and threw names my way that I did not really know. He had run many companies in

the wireless communications business. He was managing an investment fund, mostly of his own money, and was considering an investment in a competitor of ours, when his analyses led him to Wi-LAN, saying it was the best in the field. I told him I had a very sour experience with venture capitalists. I really would not want to waste much time on him unless he was willing to play to our tune and move very fast. He said to give him a timeline. I responded that if he invested by the end of January 1997, he could get the shares for \$25,000 per share, and that any minute after that, they would be \$30,000. If he was later than February 15, he might as well forget it. He accepted the challenge and came with two colleagues to visit us the following Tuesday.

I generally try to charm the people I am presenting to by trying to break the ice with a joke or two. The Investor came in wearing cowboy boots and did not show any facial expressions at any of my jokes. I thought to myself, "Okay, he is the strong silent type." We did our presentations for two days. During dinner on the second day, one of my vice presidents told him, "Do not think that because you have money, you are going to boss us around. We are doing well on our own and always will." He probably said more insults, but I do not remember. We sat at two tables, and I thanked God not everyone heard it. The employee was obviously drunk. The employee then went to the bathroom and disappeared. The Investor later discovered him unconscious. The Investor helped him out where the vice president's wife took him home in a taxi. The Investor asked me quietly, "Are you going to fire him?" implying that I should. I told The Investor, "I will stand by my employees. I have to hear his story. Since this is his first infraction, I am not going to fire him." The Investor said loudly so everyone could hear, "I have checked this company so thoroughly and was so impressed with everything I learnt that I was getting jealous; how could anyone build such a perfect organization? This incident restored my faith that Wi-LAN is not perfect. I am so impressed though; I want to invest \$3,000,000 in Wi-LAN." I asked The Investor why he seemed totally uninterested in what I was saying when he first arrived the day before. He replied, "I was frozen." It was almost minus forty degrees outside that day, and he was not properly dressed. For those that are curious, it does not matter which scale you use, Centigrade or Fahrenheit, minus forty is the same in both

scales!

The Investor did not meet the January 31 deadline, but I gave him a break on the share price. He performed wonderfully. We invited him to join the Wi-LAN board. We had one main disagreement in principle: The Investor believed we should put focus into wireless telephony; he wanted us to develop products that extend the voice telephony network, whilst I believed wireless telephony's days were numbered. We resolved this disagreement in a novel way. We agreed to set up a jointly owned company that The Investor could run as he pleased that would take our technology and modify it for wireless telephony. The Investor put in US\$3,000,000, and we were to give him exclusive rights of the use of our technology in the telephony market to this company. The company was not to compete with Wi-LAN. We placed two members on the board of directors, while The Investor placed two directors. Together we were to choose a fifth.

Things did not proceed smoothly in the new company. The Investor was more aggressive and wanted us to be stricter than we were used to in respecting timelines. I always allowed the engineers their freedom in developing products. The Investor was forcing us to change our development attitude. We eventually delivered all of what we promised. I believe he learnt that wireless telephony was not as lucrative as he originally thought. The investor had opportunities to change the direction of our wireless telephony company. A conflict arose as to how to sort out the ownership levels on an ongoing basis. We negotiated long and hard for a settlement for this conflict.

I learned something about myself in negotiating a settlement with The Investor. Since I start work very early in the morning, I burn out by mid afternoon. The Investor was different. I do not know when he began work, but he loved to start negotiating around nine at night. One time, he came to a Wi-LAN meeting in 1998 and did not make any proposals to the board. Things were so tense; we had to have Wi-LAN's legal counsel attend the board meeting to advise the board on what to say during the meeting. The Investor was almost holding us hostage. It was just before we went public; we needed The Investor's cooperation on a number of things. I told Michel that The Investor would call from his hotel and invite us over for a chat to make a proposal around 9:00 pm.

Michel laughed and left. The Investor did call. I asked Michel to let me do all the talking. The Investor made the first fair proposal to settle the dispute. I told him, "It is a well thought proposal, but it is late, and I would rather answer you after I rest." The Investor seemed shocked. I have thanked him ever since in my mind because I learned one of my limits.

Regrettably, The Investor and I never talked much afterwards. I tried to call him a few times, but he never returned my call. We met once in a trade show and exchanged pleasantries. It is sad in the business world. Friends do not last forever. When I was executing a serious round of layoffs in August 1997, The Investor stated something that still resonates in my mind, "It is lonely at the top."

In March 1997, Cell-Loc went public at \$0.40 per share. Its shares closed on the first day at \$1.20. It was a phenomenal success for Michel and myself. My vice president of business development in Wi-LAN was Aaron Dagan, an ex-Colonel in the artillery division of the Israeli army, who partially lost his hearing because of the loud explosions canons made as they shelled Arab positions during the conflicts. Aaron was a persistent individual who always knew how to get what he had in mind. Aaron had single-handedly led Wi-LAN's campaign to introduce all the larger operators to the concept of fixed wireless access and the potential use of available spectrum for two-way high-speed wireless communications. He and I met in person or on the phone with top executives in many of the phone companies, where we educated them on the applications and our vision for the future of wireless data communications.

Aaron also led a campaign to educate the semiconductor companies about our WOFDM prototype and with WOFDM. This resulted in letters of intent about potential agreements with two of the largest semiconductor companies. Eventually, we materialized an agreement with Philips Semiconductors in September 1999. We had originally met with probably ten to get to an agreement with one. We made a lot of friends in the process. Friends that shared little industry tidbits and helped me sharpen my vision for the future of the industry.

In October 2000, while I was visiting New York on a business trip, I met with *Sisso El Hamamsy*, a colleague from Cairo University and a

Ph.D. graduate from Caltech, for dinner. I invited him to apply for the position of chief operating officer. Bill Hews was the president of Wi-LAN since September 1999. I told *Sisso* to send his resume and that Bill Hews would make the decision. *Sisso* applied and accepted the job for much lower pay than he was used to. He started in January 2001. *Sisso* left his family in New York until the end of the school year in June. He was to go back once a month and rent an apartment for the six months. *Sisso* stayed with *Fatima* and me for much of this time.

Towards the end of 2000, we were the first company to tell the market that we expect 2001 to be a difficult year for sales and lowered our forecast for 2001. We announced lowered expectations sometime in November. I was in Toronto on a road show (meetings with potential investors) as we made the announcement. The institutions that met me that day commented favorably on our bravery in visiting them on such a day. They said that most executives hide when they make a negative announcement. Shortly after that, I realized it might be impossible to tap the public market and, at the rate Wi-LAN was spending cash, we could run out of cash quickly. I presented my concerns to the board. We agreed to conserve cash. Bill Hews, Wi-LAN's President at the time, suggested after the board meeting that he would be willing to give money to help the company raise some cash. I met his challenge with that I could ask my family to put about \$2-3 million. This was the seed for a financing in February 2001. We managed another one in May 2001. We concluded it might be best to eliminate some of the top management positions. Our CFO left first. Bill Hews left later. We had to terminate a lot of employees in two rounds in July and September 2001 in order to complete some pending developments.

We instated a number of rules to guide us to profitability. We decided not to develop products in anticipation of the market but rather develop products the market already wants. We also decided that in developing products for specific customers, we would have them take most, if not all, the risk. We hunkered down for the tough times ahead. We raised more capital in 2002. In 2003, the steps we took in the prior two years paid off. We became profitable in the fiscal quarters ending on July 31 and October 31, 2003. We also signed an agreement to develop chips for the WiMAX market with Fujitsu. We received some funding from

Technology Partnership Canada. These excellent developments buoyed the stock to its highest levels since 2001. In July 2003, we raised some cash and in October, we raised more. Things looked extremely good.

The July 2003 financing drained me. We signed the contract for the money on a Friday, based on the assumption that the shares issued could be free trading upon issuance. On Sunday, whilst driving to a community funeral, I heard it was not possible to issue free trading shares. We did not file the proper document to allow us to do that. The brokers warned us the deal was off and that we owed them \$1 million in commissions. I warned them that to get the \$1 million, they had to try to save the deal. They called back Monday morning to say the investors would be willing to do the deal if we could close it in a month rather than the traditional two weeks. We called the Alberta Securities Commission and asked if they would process the paperwork as fast as we needed; they assured us they could. On Tuesday, we received a call from the commission indicating they might have misled us. They could have processed the paperwork fast because they had been investigating Wi-LAN since our number came up for a routine investigation. They had some questions. Should we answer the investigator's questions, they would be glad to process the paperwork fast.

The following day, we received a list of thirty-two questions on twenty-six pages. That afternoon, *Sisso* and another executive assembled in my office to try and answer them. I looked at their faces and decided we could not do that. I called our corporate counsel and told him to phone the commission and let them know that it was unfair to put the company under so much stress. We had announced the financing before we heard about the investigation. This should have pre-empted the investigation. The counsel called before the end of the day and said they would give us the five most important questions to answer. We could answer the rest in due course. This was good news again. Within three days, we had submitted our answers to the five questions and met with the commission to resolve any issues they had with the answers. We got their nod to proceed after a week of the start of the ordeal. I have to acknowledge the great efforts of our auditors, KPMG, who helped us heroically, particularly in the absence of our acting CFO, Keith Bittner,

who went on his scheduled holidays the Monday after we announced the deal. To add to my woes, our vice president of investor and corporate relations took his holiday the following week.

We then went through the most thorough due diligence I had ever seen. Typically, a brokerage's due diligence would have cost less than \$30,000. The first bill for this due diligence was over \$180,000. The reason for the increase was that regulators had increased the responsibility of the brokerages and others in representations. With this level of due diligence, it often felt that the deal was off. This seesawing between off and on was very hard on my nerves. Work rarely stressed me; but this was definitely draining.

Shortly after the financing, I went to visit my family in Egypt. When I came back, I informed *Sisso* he was under probation as the president of the company for the following three months, and I would take it much easier to regain some energy. He did well, given that the October quarter was even better than July. *Sisso* became president of Wi-LAN in November 2003.

Sisso and I differ on what happened after that. We were committed to developing chips for Fujitsu and to develop WiMAX products, but my gut feeling was that we should not. These were developments in anticipation of the market and were outside the guidelines that helped us get to profitability in the first place. We took our differences to the board of directors in a meeting. *Sisso's* views won on two grounds: we were committed to the development of the chip and needed more competitive products or our revenue would have depleted. Interestingly, I could only afford to oppose the development, since I was then the CEO and not the president. If I had still been the president, I would have had a tough time opposing the developments. In any case, these decisions cost us our profitability.

I do not want to mislead anyone into thinking that I was a great CEO. I know I had faults. The biggest (in my view) was an inability to function well in large meetings, where I had to pay attention to many speakers. I attribute this to a desire to focus on the topic and the speaker. It is very hard to focus when there are many speakers. The end result was that I was often short with executives and often interrupted them prematurely. This was not the case in one-on-one meetings. Another

major shortcoming was my persistent pursuit for bigger and better things. I was quick to abandon a project for another better one. All our projects yielded fruits but not enough of them. Another shortcoming was that I was always too far ahead of the organization. I made deals that the rest of the company often struggled to meet its deliverables. This always strained our resources. Finally, I was brought up on a strict budget and never raised too much capital. In March 2000, I should have raised \$300 million, not \$30 million, like I did. I always said I would have wasted much of the \$300 million; nevertheless, when the drought came, we

may have had \$100 million instead of the \$10 million we did have.

Personal Business Lessons

What did I learn personally from my years at Wi-LAN?

When we started the company, I always said I knew nothing about product development or business. I was like a blind man. The only way I could move forward and lead a company was to take calculated short steps: make sure the new ground I was on was solid and then make the next step. This worked well for the first years. I even applied this to hardware development. I thought of a new process, developing hardware just like software engineers tackled new programs. When a programmer wants to write a new program, he or she would often start with a shell that does nothing but print the desired input and output of the program. Then the programmer would build the program with simple routines that perform the various functions needed. This was how we developed our first prototypes. Five engineers made a prototype OFDM device in less than ten months. It did not work well, but it worked. For five years, I believe it was the only prototype of a high-speed two-way wireless OFDM radio that cost less than \$1,000 per end in the world. I believe laboratories with hundreds of engineers could not have developed this. Our methodology was unique. All our engineers had, almost, only Masters degrees, and all but one, were fresh graduates. These engineers worked very hard and believed. They believed they could do it, and they did.

We needed cash early. Michel and his wife invited their brothers to invest in Wi-LAN. We had a moral obligation to achieve the plans they saw. The only thing they cared about as shareholders was the vision that their investment (what they paid \$10,000 for) could possibly be worth \$280,000 within five years. Well, within seven years, they could have sold their \$10,000 shares for \$970,000. I think we delivered on our plan. Of course, they all wanted to be part of an advanced hi-tech

company that led wireless communications. This was partially fulfilled in the days of the OFDM Forum, where a director in a big company said he never thought he would take his cue from a small company, but he believed that through proper cooperation, OFDM could be in every wireless communicator, from a garage door opener to an Internet cell phone.

I learnt to be committed. Once we took people's money, I had no choice but to lead the company to success – where the shareholders had a chance to live their dream. I learnt that with belief and commitment, one could do anything one dreams of.

I should have left the helm at Wi-LAN at two different times: early in 2000, when the shares soared and in 2003, when we achieved profitability. In 2000, it never crossed my mind. I got carried away. In 2003, I wanted to leave, but there was no apparent replacement for my role as chief executive officer. From the board of directors' point of view, I had, by February 2005, overstayed my welcome. This was a situation I had thought about and never wanted to happen. I did not anticipate the board's plan to remove *Sisso* and myself. It did not bother me except for the fact I never like to be caught off-guard.

I incorporated my next company the day after I agreed to step aside. I had already developed its concepts in my head even while sitting in the final Wi-LAN board meeting. I was not at a loss at what I would have loved to do. I was worried about Wi-LAN. I did not see anybody who could replace me nor lead the company during the tough times it was heading into.

In Wi-LAN, I had seen all earthly temptations. I saw the temptation of money. Repeatedly, I was offered bribes. I did not see them as such at the time but definitely and categorically refused arguing with whomever offered them. It just did not feel right. I was tempted by women. Repeatedly, women came to me and wanted to start some relationship. I was saved from most by a number of factors. I definitely believed it was wrong and did not want to have affairs. Second, my assistant Kim Lickman was watchfully guarding me and would never allow a girl or a lady to walk into my office without fully recording the purpose of the meeting. She did not set up meetings with most of the ladies that asked for them aimlessly. She also made sure the door was never fully shut. I

was too busy knowing where I was headed business-wise to notice advances. I never viewed myself as the type of man that could be the object of a woman's desire. Finally, I was naïve. I never saw an advance as such. I always saw an advance as a friendly approach.

The temptation I was not prepared for was success. By late 1999, I was a bit of an icon in my immediate circles. People came to me from all over the world wanting to do business with me personally. From radio announcers in far away cities to hockey players. They all wanted to make money with me. It was easy: get involved in a start up. Make sure the plan was sound, and voila! We made money. I was involved in five initial public offerings: Wi-LAN Inc., Cell-Loc Inc., Clarity Networks, QCC Technologies, and DNS Inc. All but DNS did phenomenally well. Shareholders had a chance to sell at more than fifty times their original investment. I joined the board of Digital Imaging and its shares soared. DNS' shareholders eventually had a chance to sell their shares at practically the same as they invested.

By the middle of 2000, I was beginning to think I had the Midas touch. I could wave my wand and dust turns into gold. When the stock dipped after March 2000, I thought of ways to promote the company. It succeeded perfectly. We had a second rise in the stock around August 2000. But from there, stocks slid. One came up with all kinds of schemes to increase shareholder awareness or interest in the stock. For over a year, I kept thinking there must be something I could do. I tried everything I knew. Nothing worked. I thought I had altruistic goals as to why I wanted the stock to rise again. I wanted to be able to sell maybe \$100 or \$200 million worth of shares and save the money to help Muslim causes in Calgary and around the world. After September 11, when I went to *Mecca* to feel the pulse of the Muslim nation, I learnt the stock would take care of itself. I needed to stop trying to improve the stock price, and instead, do the things I always liked to do in business and also give some attention towards community work.

The drop in share price saved me from believing in myself. I do not like to ponder about what could have happened about anything. However, this is one situation where I believe if the stocks did not fall after 2000, I would have totally believed in my abilities and forgotten that every success I had and everything I ever achieved was by *Allah*

and from *Allah*.

The American People

“They have four qualities. They have the patience to undergo a trial and immediately restore themselves to sanity. They attack again after flight. They (have the quality) of being good to the destitute. The good quality in them is that they put resistance against the oppression of kings.” (Sahih Muslim - 52:10)

In this chapter, I would like to summarize my observations about the American people. As the United States throughout my generation has been the more dominant factor in world politics, third world citizens have always been fascinated with its affairs. I would like to state that I personally believe that the US government for the longest time has reflected the nature of its people: great? based on good principles. However, since the Reagan administration, and the Oliver North shredding of documents, we have come to learn that the US government is not totally honest with its people. This has led to a gap between the reality about the American people and the actions the US government take. This gap is getting bigger and bigger.

It is impossible for me to truly appreciate all the experiences that the American people share together. It is difficult to understand the dynamics of how groups of emigrants decide to forcefully break away from the lands they emigrated from. One can imagine the struggles between the republicans wanting to separate from Britain and the loyalists wanting to stay part of the British Empire. Possibly, each person may have had a bit of both in him: sort of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome. However, we know that the Americans broke away from the British in a bitter fight and finally declared their independence on July 4, 1776. In 1814, British troops launched a surprise attack from Newfoundland and burnt down the White House, which was not white before its

reconstruction.

The American people still had to fight their own war to define themselves better. The Civil War raged for four years from 1861 to 1865. It was fought between the northern and southern states. This was a bigger Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome than the war for independence. This is best exemplified by the fact that Robert E. Lee was offered command of the Union (northern) army and declined on April 15, 1861. Two days later, his birth state, Virginia seceded from the Union and joined the Confederation (south). Lee declared on April 20, "I cannot raise my hand against my birthplace, my home, my children." With this, he quit his commission in the Union army and commanded the military and naval forces of Virginia. The Union won, and on January 31, 1866, Congress finally approved a bill abolishing slavery.

Though slavery was the focal point of the Civil War, it is most likely the war was about the major differences in lifestyles between the industrialized north and the farming south. The north tended to be more liberal and more focused on technology and banking. The south was more likely to be conservative and focused on resources and farming. Liberal attitudes generally include supporting abortion and being less conscious about the race of individuals. Conservative attitudes are displayed in support of banning abortion, more focused on being Christian, and being aware of the differences between skin colors and altering lifestyles.

The American political life is centered on the policies of two main parties. The Democratic Party was founded in 1792 by Thomas Jefferson and ironically was called the Democratic-Republican Party until 1842. The Republican Party was founded in 1854. Even though, at the time, it was the third party; it succeeded in getting Abraham Lincoln to the presidency in 1860.

Many southern white people, Rednecks, still often refer to African-Americans as niggers and would rarely approve of their daughter dating one. They often say, "If God wanted us to mix, He would have created us the same color." Baptist Christian southerners generally vote Republican for a common view that the Republicans are more conservative and more Christian than the Democrats and also because

their preachers advise them to do so. Though in the early elections, this was not a major factor.

The American people are wonderful, friendly, kind people. I recall that even though President *Nasser* of Egypt was always anti-American after the World Bank's refusal to finance his High Dam project, Egyptian children, including myself, were steadily fed a daily snack from sacks labeled "American Aid." I recall buying animal margarine from government distribution centers that had the same labeling. This is definitely a sign of a great people. To be kind to someone who is against you is noble and great.

If one studies American intervention in world affairs prior to President Ronald Reagan's reign, we see it was based on a consistent strategy. Even though the United States was established by breaking away from England, the country was quick to answer the English's need for help in both World Wars. It is impossible to sit in 2005 and determine exactly what happened in both wars, but it is safe to assume that in the Second World War, the US joined the allies against the tyrant leaders of Germany and Italy. The alliance with the tyrant leader of Russia, Joseph Stalin, spoiled the picture somewhat, but one could overlook it for the greater good. After the end of the Second World War, the American government and the American people treated communism as the sworn enemy and went around the world trying to contain communist revolutions.

Growing up in Egypt and watching American intervention in Vietnam, one was not impressed with the tactics of the American government in handling the Viet Kong or dealing with the Northern Vietnamese. However, in retrospect and with a lot of analysis, it is safe to say that the American government, at least, was consistent in its opposition to communist movements. One may not agree with the tactics but could agree with the strategy. One can further assume that the Americans were compensating for their alliance with the "devil" (Stalin) during the war.

A few more traits one has to give to the American people is they have applied democracy well. Democracy originally was meant to establish a house of representatives. For someone to represent someone else, there has to be some form of awareness about each other. Originally,

where there were only thirty million Americans in America, having a few hundred representatives was sufficient. However, now, with over three hundred million Americans, it is impossible for approximately five hundred people to represent them. Today, voters have to rely almost entirely on party platforms and TV commercials to decide whom to vote for. In spite of this shortcoming, the American people succeeded in removing President Richard Nixon from office. Nixon was a great president because he guided America out of turning China into another Cold War foe. He visited China and Russia, Americans went to the moon under his watch, and his presidency put an end to the Vietnam War. He calculatingly slowed down providing weapons to Israel during the 1973 war, so the Arabs could gain sufficient lead so as to facilitate peace. However, one serious criminal offence was sufficient to bring him down. A break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel in Washington and a refusal to hand over audiotapes of pertinent White House conversations led to his presidency's demise. This was democracy in action.

Most people living in Third World countries, including myself when I lived in Egypt, do not understand how US politics work. There are often great simplifications, assuming the media is controlled by a small group of people that are well organized and that the American president is much like most Third World tyrants. There may be an element of truth to the first assumption but definitely not to the second. The Third World is not worried about internal US policies. What worries them are decisions like the Americans' steady support of Israel, even when it breaks one United Nations' resolution after another. However, what most people outside the US do not understand is that such decisions were popular; meaning most Americans would have agreed with these decisions.

The American people are great because they get back on their feet quickly after catastrophes. One can list numerous examples, such as World War II battles that the sheer unwillingness to lose helped them win the battle. One look at how southern cities and towns recovered from hurricanes illustrates this aspect of greatness. The government failure to properly prepare for Hurricane Katrina in the summer of 2005 did not stop the drenched city of New Orleans from trying to get back to normal life within months.

Finally, American people tend to be kind and help the poor. Even though the government slowed its aid to poor Third World countries as a percentage of gross national product, the American people continue to be very generous individuals. Churches were capable of raising millions of dollars for the Asian tsunami relief in 2005.

It is easy to imagine what led America and the Americans to greatness. One, they have much land with a lot of untapped resources. Another is isolation from world problems. Other than the limited damage from the War of Independence and the Civil War, the US mainland was never attacked until September 11, 2001. I think we should add to the list: the freedom Americans enjoy in all aspects of life, particularly freedom of speech, the freedom of the press and media, a great sense of adventure, and an open, capitalistic approach.

America's ascension to power got a lift with the two World Wars. Europe devastated itself in those conflicts and grew exhausted rebuilding itself. The Soviet Union had the land and the resources but lacked in spirit and capitalism. The Cold War drained the Soviet Union's limited resources, and the Afghanistan war finished it off. The US has become the only superpower on the world stage after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

It is the freedom, combined with capitalism that has begun to erode some of the greatness of the US. Not that of the people, but of the government. This can be exemplified by a number of examples: the most glaring of them is the build-up leading to the first Gulf War. Traditionally, the American people would not have cared if Iraq invaded Kuwait. The way Americans were conditioned would have been: two primitive nations were dueling; should not really matter. As a matter of fact, it appeared this was the kind of message the US Ambassador gave *Saddam Hussein* shortly before he invaded Kuwait, "We will treat this as an internal matter." It was understood the ambassador probably talked about Iraq crossing the disputed international border but stopping short at the undisputed border of Kuwait. However, a statement like the one made by the ambassador did not merit the kind of reaction the US took to the misunderstanding.

A number of TV documentaries have shown how the American people were manipulated so they could build up anger against *Saddam*

and sympathy for Kuwait. The American people sent their youth in harm's way to restore a tyrant monarch back on his throne. If this situation was presented this way, I am sure the American public would not have supported the war. Instead what they saw was TV footage about a testimony from a volunteer nurse named Nayirah who testified before a special session of the "Congressional Human Rights Caucus Committee" on October 10, 1990 that she witnessed Iraqi soldiers tossing babies out of incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals to take the incubators to Iraq. Later, it was revealed that Nayirah was not a nurse; she was actually the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador in the US, who was never in Kuwait during the crisis. American public opinion was measured after each airing of this false testimony, and the message was tuned to make sure the maximum sympathy of the public for the Kuwaiti cause was attained. (<http://emperors-clothes.com/articles/kelly/what.htm>).

It is this kind of calculating manipulation that hurts the democratic process. Democracy is great if the government represents the people and does what the people want. When matters are reversed, such that people are manipulated so the government can execute its plan, something has gone wrong. What is the difference between this approach and Hitler's flaring speeches? One big difference is the freedom of the press and the media. However, if the media is interested in making money and the group manipulating the news has the money or the control of the media, democracy is in trouble.

The parties with money before the first Gulf War that needed to manipulate the US public opinion were the Kuwaiti princes. They had everything to gain. They fled the country during the Iraqi invasion. They wanted their country back. They hired the top public relations firms in the world to help them achieve their goal of winning the sympathy and support of the Americans. This was easy, given the Americans' greatness in helping the needy.

However, even as I point out the unfortunate situation whereby the mighty dollar can change the mind of the American public and make them support an unworthy cause, I have to admire American democracy that forces the government to need public support for major decisions.

I have not followed many other issues closely. However, we have a number of incidents that require more investigation. We have the plight

of the Palestinian people. This does not get even a few seconds of media coverage each year. We had the focus on the negatives about the *Taliban*. There was rarely a mention of how they brought stability to a war-torn country or how they nearly abolished the heroin trade that has since flourished under the American rule of Afghanistan. We have no interest by the American public in the continuous breach by Israel of UN resolutions. This last is manipulated enough, such that, there is a dispute the media has developed – contrary to the text of ongoing UN resolutions – over whether Israel is actually occupying the occupied territories it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War.

An unfortunate incident that may deserve more light to be shed on is the explosion that destroyed the space shuttle *Challenger* during its tenth launch on January 28, 1986. This was a very unfortunate event. On board were seven crewmembers, including a schoolteacher. The inclusion of the schoolteacher made this a national pride event. However, one important fact that does not get mentioned is that the shuttle was supposed to carry a telescope for the Strategic Defense Initiative, SDI, otherwise known as Star Wars.

The Soviet Union was opposed to the whole SDI concept. According to Michael Gorbachev, their general secretary at the time, they had other plans and did not want to spend time or money on developing an equivalent to the American SDI. Let's add more facts. In January 1986, President Reagan announced the shuttles would no longer carry commercial payloads after five years of use. This was a hint that everybody must find their own ride to space. On April 18, 1986, a Lockheed Martin Titan rocket failed shortly after launch. On April 25, 1986, a Nike Orion rocket was lost. On May 3, 1986, the most reliable rocket in the US space delivery system of the time, Boeing's Delta II, lost power in its main engine shortly after launch, forcing safety officers to destroy it by remote control. In summary, in 1986, the US made six successful launches into space and failed four times. The year 1986 had the lowest number of launches of any year and the highest percentage of failures (forty percent) since 1965. This is in comparison with an average thirty-four out of six hundred thirty launches in the prior years.

In June 1986, NASA cancelled a planned launch of a Centaur rocket. The first successful launch after the *Challenger* disaster was announced

for months before and publicized as a needed replacement for an aging weather satellite. In the summer of 1986, the US Congress revived an old discussion and quickly approved the launch of nuclear missiles from railway cars. This sounded like trivial news. Putting nuclear missiles on trains was no different than having them transported via trucks or planes. The argument against this decision was that trains could have accidents in populated cities. What was the argument for it?

It was commonly known during the Cold War that the Soviet long-range ballistic missiles were more mobile than those of the US. They were generally launched from trucks. American missiles were launched from stationary positions. Growing up in a pro-Soviet Union country, we used to be told that the Soviet Union had a minor advantage. Their missiles did not need to change direction too much. They could point in the right direction upon launch, whereas American missiles were shot upwards. Of course, this excluded the limited number of shorter-range missiles aboard nuclear submarines. A trip to the Cold War front in West and East Germany in 1983 easily illustrated this issue. American missiles pointed upwards and Soviet missiles were tilted.

On February 19, 1986, the Soviet Union launched the first component of its Mir space station. Mir means peace in Russian. On April 26, 1986, a mysterious explosion was recorded in Pripyat, Ukraine. The Soviet Union announced two days later a nuclear accident had occurred in the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, killing thirty-one and radiating thousands. Damage was estimated to be \$130 billion.

The theory I quickly developed was the Soviet opposition to Reagan's Star Wars initiative was bigger, stronger, and more actionable than we were led to believe. I thought the Soviets must have given Reagan a stern clear warning they would drop any object carrying Star Wars equipment if it were launched. The US had to test the Soviet capability. They did with the shuttle. Putting a teacher aboard that fatal mission was an attempt to weaken the Soviet resolve. The Soviets showed little appreciation for human life before and were eager to show their capabilities.

The Soviets, according to their scientific claims, invented the laser before the US did. It was commonly known in the Soviet Block that the Soviet Union had experimented with large lasers in valleys. The lasers

were so powerful; they burnt everything in those valleys. With these experiments, the Soviets must have developed a laser strong enough to burn a hole in the booster of a rocket. I theorize they placed this laser on a satellite or a rudimentary space station. The Soviets in 1986 would not put a space station in space for scientific reasons. The only logical justifiable use was to destroy American missiles after they were launched. The Soviets were never too fancy in their weaponry. Their laser would have been programmed to focus on specific sites. They probably did not have the technology to monitor the entire earth and determine if a launch happened anywhere on the planet. They must have focused their attention to the fixed sites of the US missiles. It is not difficult to focus a beam on a trajectory of an object as big as a rocket booster. This would explain the four consecutive US launch failures and the decision to place missiles on railway cars.

Why were the Soviets afraid of Star Wars then? A careful read of the public transcripts suggests they were leery of the spending. However, Michael Gorbachev told Reagan in Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986, the Soviets had their own system.

If we are talking about Reagan, what was the Iran-Contra cover-up about? Was the US public kept in the dark about their government's illegal activities in selling drugs and using the proceeds to buy arms and sell them to Iran? Other countries were forbidden to trade with Iran, based on a US sponsored initiative, and the US was giving them weapons. This deal was apparently part of a bigger deal, where the American hostages, captured by the Iranian students in the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979, were released at the beginning of the Reagan reign.

Bill Clinton also had his faults. Some of these were immoral. A few questions arose: what do you expect of your president? Do you want him to be an angel? I have a theory that all astronomically successful men have three things in common: they love to cook; they love fast cars; they love fast women. It takes super-willpower to be able to resist the third of these passions. Most men are obsessed with sex. Every decent mother teaches her girl, "Boys only have one thing on their mind" or "boys don't think with their brain." Why is this supposed to stop at the doors of the White House? Of course, we expect more from people in office. But, allow me another question. Wouldn't you rather have a

president that loves women and commits indecent acts as opposed to a president that starts a war for the wrong reasons and puts the whole country in harm's way? They definitely are both bad examples, however, isn't there a scale for how bad a person is? I want to share another point of view in defense of Bill Clinton. He definitely lied to the American people about his affair with Monica Lewinsky. However, one has to ask a general moral question: is it okay to lie sometimes? The answer must be "Yes; if a larger gain can be attained." Bill Clinton had to live with his family after leaving the White House. It was best for him and his family to lie about the incident than to readily admit it. It is a point of view.

The biggest lie to the American people in recent times has been about Iraq and the reasons for invading it. It is not possible to ascertain the real reasons the US was determined to attack Iraq, in spite of mounting evidence that showed all the excuses the US gave for invading it were feeble or fabricated. The Iraqi attempt to purchase uranium from Niger was a major embarrassment for the White House. It was sad to hear the UN nuclear watchdog declared the document a forgery after President George W. Bush referred to it in his 2003 State of Union address.

The sad point about the Iraq issue is that there might have been other ways to remove *Saddam* from governing without making the entire population suffer. There was no doubt the removal of *Saddam Hussein* was a good thing; but at what cost? After the war, the US declared it would stay in Iraq until the country was secure. Iraq could not be secure with the US forces in it. It was obvious the insurgents were opposed to the US occupation. One way to end the insurgency would be to end the occupation or hint to its end. The US did neither. The actions of the US suggest it planned to stay there for the foreseeable future.

The American people learnt about the errors the US administration made in justifying the war against Iraq. It became obvious Iraq was invaded for wrong reasons. However, this did not stop the American people from giving George W. Bush a second term in office. Unfortunately, this made the American people co-conspirators with their president. God does not like a nation to be unfair to other nations or to use its power indiscriminately. One can say that each great empire was founded on great principles, and as they rose to power, they forgot the

principles that brought them there. Instead, it focused on luxury, leisure, and eventually oppressing other nations. This was true of all great civilizations, whether it was the Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman, the Muslim, the European Western, or the American Western.

Why should the American people care about world politics? Why should they not let the president decide what he sees fit? After all, he has access to more and better information than they do. There is a simple answer to this question: the future of our children.

We are actively planting the seeds of hatred around the world. Our children will have to fight the results of these fruits for the next century. Also, we are not consistent. We go through great pains to explain to our kids how the war for our independence was justifiable. We justify why we helped the French resistance to free France. We justify why it was important to save the Jews from Hitler. We explain why we had to fight communism. However, we tell our kids that Palestinians have no right to fight the Israelis out of the occupied territories. *Hamas*, an organization that never attacked anyone outside the conflict zone, is a terrorist organization. Ariel Sharon, who allowed the massacres of Palestinian refugees in *Sabra* and *Shatila* by Christian Lebanese militia, when he led the Israeli troops into Beirut in September 1982, is a respected world leader who visits the American president whenever he pleases. Let me correct that, a respected world leader who ignored the instructions of George W. Bush on almost all issues.

What do people do when they learn of the confusion? They rebel. Our children rebel by taking drugs, consuming alcohol, and imitating violence.

This is further complicated by the fact we are becoming prone to depression. Depression is one of the least understood diseases. Doctors are quick to prescribe for depression. Situational depression, in contrast to chemical depression, is generally the result of the inability to handle the tough curves life throws at us. We are becoming spoilt. We are accustomed to leisure and luxury and getting whatever our hearts desire. Most of us didn't have many of these luxuries when we were kids, so we try to overcompensate. This does not work. Kids need to know that there are limits and that being able to buy does not mean one should buy.

Kids need to be disciplined. Kids need firm love. We spoiled our

kids. When they grew up, they were frustrated about why life did not give them everything they wanted. Where was Prince Charming for her? Where was his convertible Mustang with the blonde in the passenger seat whose hair flies all around in the air? Combine spoilt with selfishness and you get the perfect ingredients for depression.

The frustrated grown up child keeps thinking about the same, so-called, misfortune until his brain is so tired of thinking of it that it turns off the receptors receiving pulses from the nerves. This is a mechanism for self-protection. The person then loses emotions, becomes disconnected from their environment, and subsequently grows depressed. After a few of these sessions – and they get worse over time – the person decides to mention it to their doctor. Doctors prescribe all kinds of medicine when the only thing they should prescribe should be an antibiotic for infections, if they are sure the infections are out of control. In any case, the depressed person takes the medicine, and it does two things: it forces the receptors to work somehow. This makes the brain think about what it was trying to avoid thinking about. Often, in weaker people such as youth, this makes them suicidal. A slower effect is the feeling of euphoria. The person starts to feel elated. The problem is not solved, but everything seems to be fine.

The real solution to depression is to accept the misfortunes we cannot do anything about. I once read a chain email, where it was said that Bill Gates' number one advice to school kids was: Life is unfair; get used to it! I am not sure he said this, but he was smart enough and experienced enough to have said it. Accept! Accept! Accept! This does not mean you can't be ambitious or try to improve things. It means, accept the issues life throws at you, like the death of a parent or a child, not being loved by someone you like, etc. If people are unfair to you, complain to the right people who can correct the situation, do something, work hard, and get even without being unfair. Stop asking why!

Of course, on a higher level, there is an answer to every question. Why do bad things happen to people? Three reasons. Bad things happen as punishment for things that people had done in the past. When a bad thing happens to a person, they should analyze if they did a similar bad thing to someone else; if they did, they should try to correct it. The second reason is God likes to test people's patience and perseverance. If

someone passes the test and handles a problem well, one earns credits with God and gets good things later. If one does not react well, one loses credits and should work on their faith. Most believers believe in moderately good times; everybody believes at the bleakest of moments. It is important to believe in the best of times and moderately bad times as well.

Actually, typical belief goes through stages that are proportional to wealth. In the middle classes, when one is well off, one thanks God. When one is in a tough situation, one scrambles for earthly means to fix his problems. When one is in real bad trouble, one prays. This last scenario is common, even with disbelievers. When they think there is no other way to get them out of the situation they are in, they pray. The last group is the very wealthy group; and most of them think they do not need God. One should think of bad things as either a feedback or a feed forward mechanism. God does not burden any person with a burden they cannot handle. How we perceive the burden is the problem.

Now, as a nation, the Americans have acted somewhat depressive because of the September 11 events. We ask the question “why?” but we do not hear the answer. Why did some nineteen hijackers kill themselves and thousands of Americans? The answer came quickly from Bush administration: “They want to change our lifestyle.” This was calculated to instill fear into the nation. The Muslims are coming, and they will kill every American unless they live like Muslims, unless the women cover their hair, unless there is no drinking, unless there is no freedom. This sounds ridiculous, but when I asked many southern Americans over forty years of age, those were the answers they gave me. The youth did not see it that way.

Well, was President Bush right? Of course, he was mostly wrong but somewhat right. Muslims, for the most part, do not want to hurt anybody nor kill anyone, let alone all Americans. The Muslims did come and unfortunately, did not act with the love that our Prophet preached when he said, “You are not a true believer unless you love for your brother what you love for yourself.” Muslims scholars agree that this brotherhood is for all of mankind. There is no doubt that whoever committed the hijacking and killing on September 11 was wrong. However, these were frustrated young men who expressed their

frustration wrong. They were frustrated with the unbalanced American policies in the Middle East. They were frustrated about the American interference in the affairs of Muslim countries, supporting tyrants that suppress their people. They believed Israel and the US were the terrorists, and that by martyring, they were hurting the terrorists.

Are Muslims interested in forcing their views on the Americans? The difficulty in answering this question stems from the fact that there are over one billion Muslims in the world, and there must be five thousand or so who do. However, Muslims, overall, are not allowed to force their views on others. *Islam* is a religion of freedom. But in looking at Muslim countries, this does not seem to be the case. What we see upon a first glance is the result of a century of Western colonization of Muslim countries. The people in these countries are waking up and demanding their freedom. Meanwhile, the US supports the tyrants. They blame the Muslims for lacking freedom. It is a sad circular situation.

It will not remain like this. No one – no matter how many nuclear weapons they have – can force their will on people who know they have a free will.

Now What?

The day after I left Wi-LAN in February 2005, I started the paperwork to incorporate my new company. I wanted to start a company to commercialize one idea that I had. I originally wanted to retire but knew that I still had two ideas that may make some people lots of money. The first idea was to use centrifugal force to remove grease from fried foods. This would be an attachment to a common household blender or food processor. I had invented this a few years earlier and *Mohammed*, my stepson, had prototyped it for me. It works like the spin cycle of a washing machine. A strainer sits inside a wider bowl. The strainer rotates fast and throws the grease out of any foods placed inside it. I had tried the prototype on French fries (or should I say Freedom Fries) and it worked miraculously.

I had wanted some of my friends in the Muslim community to take the idea and start a business around it and keep the profits for the community. However, as in most cases, if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself. I thought that I would have some investors from the community fund the one idea, and we moved on quickly. I was surprised there was reluctance from the community to fund it. In any case, I tried to incorporate Innovative Products Inc., but the name was taken. We incorporated Innovative Products for Life Inc.

Kim Lickman joined me in IPL. She helped make starting the company a breeze. Also, we had all the business contacts to be able to get anything we wanted done. The company was set up in the offices of Mr. *Ali Jomaa*. *Ali* is a lawyer who is a prominent member of the Muslim community in Calgary. We had grown closer over my term as Chairman of the Muslim Council. *Ali* sold us some of his furniture. My brother *Ahmed's* company was closing its offices in Calgary. I bought some of the furniture and equipment from him, and he donated the rest to the community. Within two weeks from start-up, we had a fully functional office.

I wanted to hire one engineer and one marketing person to sell the product. *Sisso* later joined the team. We decided to work on a few more projects. *Sisso*'s wife, Rachel, had an idea to develop an edger for lawns, based on her use of a bread knife to do her edging. We decided to try to finish a product based on that.

I originally wanted the strainer for the degreaser to be made of plastic. *Sisso* felt that stainless steel was better. We approached the brother of a member of the community who lived in China to work on manufacturing it for us. He pointed out that he was marketing a line of cosmetics based on the Dead Sea mud and minerals. We investigated that line and loved it. I flew to Jordan, via Jerusalem, and tried the natural Dead Sea mud on my own skin. I covered my body with mud one afternoon. The next day, I felt like I cut myself while shaving. I could not see the cut. As I put on aftershave, I felt the cut but still could not see it. Three days later, I saw the cut. The mud had the miraculous power to pull the skin together. I met with the manufacturers of the Rivage line of cosmetics, and we negotiated the exclusive right to market their products in Canada.

A handyman who worked on my house in Calgary asked me one day what I had been doing after leaving Wi-LAN. I told him about IPL. He told me he had an idea for us. The idea was to develop solar powered backlit house numbers. I loved it. We checked and found out it was already on the market. As I told the handyman this, he said he had another idea. It was to cool water for pets using an ice pack. People do not want their dog licking a pack they put in their freezer. We decided to build a compartment for the ice pack. As we approached a plastic molding company, they told us they had a product an employee had developed and was selling locally. It was a skate sharpener. This was another novel idea. Within six months, we had at least three products in the company, all with good potential.

Innovative Products for Life Inc. hired one more engineer, a few more marketing people, and accepted investment from some of the early investors in Wi-LAN, as well as some community members. *Sisso* and I had many discussions to ensure that the company will be run smoothly, somewhere in the middle between my style and his. I have a good feeling about IPL. It has the right people working in it. I have distributed the

shares in it to all the people that are close to me so they can share in the wealth it may generate.

I told many friends and colleagues about the *hadeeths* and the prophecies in them. I had formulated my interpretation of the prophecies and how they correlate with current world events. I could almost clearly see where we are in Muslim prophecies and how events will unfold. I thought I was alone with this interpretation but an Imam gave a speech in a mosque one Friday that asserted my interpretation of one *hadeeth*. I felt stronger about all of this. I told my wife one day late in 2000, “2001 will be a difficult year. I have a feeling something big will happen in the US, now that Bush is likely to be president. He sounds naïve about world politics; in fact naïve enough to either ignore world issues or interfere wrongly. I feel that the American people will be polarized with or against Muslims within 2001.” She asked me, “What could happen that would polarize Americans?” I was not prepared for this question. I thought about it and replied, “What if a terrorist event happened that was blamed on Muslims?” She said, “There is nothing new about that.” I said, “What if it is a big event that kills hundreds of Americans on US soil?” She was quiet, agreeing.

September 11 happened. Muslims have been blamed for it, though no one admitted doing it nor was tried in a court of law and proven guilty in public. There are a number of guilty pleas but no trial thus far. It leaves one wondering if we will ever know the truth about what happened and why.

I predicted that Bush would be re-elected. For people living outside the US, this seemed impossible. All thought “no way.” Bush seemed not to do anything right, whether for the economy or the world. Why would anyone re-elect him? Many of my US friends told me they would not vote for him again. All, but one, voted for Bush. Americans may have been uncertain about Bush and his naiveté in 2000, but they definitely knew whom they were voting for in 2004.

I kept telling my predictions to people until at least four people in a row told me that my predictions are interesting on their own. Meaning, even if they did not occur in the future, they make for a good story. They encouraged me to write this story. Well, here I am. I had to give some context to the predictions and hence all the previous chapters.

The Rest of the Story

Prophet Mohammed once went on the pulpit repeatedly between the regular prayers and told his followers all the big events that will happen from that day onwards till the Day of Judgment. They forgot most of it since it did not concern them and they focused on what brought them to heaven. (Sahih Muslim 2892)

This chapter is the reason I wrote this book. It reminds me of Bill Cosby's sketches about Fat Albert, when he would tell many long stories explaining how fat Fat Albert was, then say, "I told you this so I can tell you this story." The earlier chapters have tried to invite you inside the mind of a Muslim to see how he views the world. It also attempted to explain that Muslims are normal human beings just like Western Christians. It finally tried to build that there are Muslim characters out there that one may relate to. The chapter about the American people was meant to lead to that there is a growing gap between the actions of the US government and the sentiments of the American people. This gap will grow big enough that it will lead to a new world order where individuals will take charge. This chapter explains how one individual, the Person, can rise to power through the help of other individuals. Of course, because I am Muslim, I believe the Person is Muslim. However, I encourage people of faith to accept that the Person is just a good believer. There are many Muslim predictions through the *Quran* and *hadeeth* about the End of Times. This chapter attempts to present my view on how some of these predictions on the End of Times. I have divided this chapter into three parts. The first part about the rise of the individual is based on my view that the End of Times is near. This brings a number of theological difficulties for Muslims: not the least of which is the belief that there are leaders before the End of Times that will govern the world with fairness and justice and will spread the wealth between all people. This rise of the individual part gives my explanation for how all this can

happen within a few years. These views are not those of most Muslims. As a matter of fact, they are very unique to me. I have heard of one or two other Muslims around the world that share my sense of optimism about the fact that things will get much better globally soon.

Another difficulty with my theory that End of Times is near is the fact that Muslims believe that Islam must at some point, before the End of Times, feel like a stranger on earth just like when it started. I had tried to explain this away earlier in the book when I mentioned that during the 1960s, Islam was a stranger in Egypt with immorality at its highest, Islamic leaders are executed whilst being viewed as traitors, the best of the Egyptian army was fighting Muslims in Yemen and the loss of Jerusalem to Israel. The second part tells some Muslim beliefs about a leader that will rule the world. The third part tells some Muslim beliefs about the Anti-Christ. These last three parts are not meant to be comprehensive in any way.

A New World Order: The Rise of the Individual

Given the circumstances around the world, finally, a Muslim person, the Person, will step up to use public relations effectively to send the proper messages about *Islam*. He writes articles in the papers, expressing strong views against violence of all sorts and stresses that in this time and age, we do not need to resolve any problem in the world with force. He also explains man has developed intellectually enough that we should be able to discuss any issue and arrive at conclusions about almost everything, including the existence of God, prophets, and what is right in which religion, etc. He grows popular, since right wing people will like his moral stands. The left wing people will also like his stand on social issues and peace. As his writing star rises, he is invited on television to comment on current events such as suicide bombings, the insurgency in Iraq, and other issues that are stereotypical *Islam*. He expresses his views. More and more people want to hear him. Most will like what he has to say. Some will hate it but will continue to be glued to their TVs watching him. He will stress the commonality of religions, such as Jesus will return and raise the faithful with him to heaven. He will challenge the world into a dialogue about religion. One can imagine a daily one-hour program, where representatives of the major religions are asked questions – not necessarily live – and they respond to them without interacting with each other or arguing and let the viewers judge which one has made the most sense. He would propose solutions to world issues.

He would suggest that all Muslim guerrillas everywhere should drop their weapons and cease fighting. He will insist all countries must begin to dialogue with grieving Muslims to solve issues. He would propose common sense solutions for most of these issues. He would visit the Middle East and meet with leaders of militant groups and ask them to drop their weapons. He would propose a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

1. Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders by taking all Israelis out of the West Bank and Gaza but without dismantling the settlements.
2. A Palestinian state is established in the West Bank and Gaza strips. This state must be demilitarized (no army whatsoever – the maximum weaponry they can use are machine guns).
3. The right of return by the Palestinian refugees is relinquished in exchange for re-settlement in the West Bank and Gaza.
4. A \$100B fund would be established to build cities, an infrastructure, and generate employment within those cities for the refugees. All countries currently affected by the crisis would contribute to this fund.
5. An agreement would be reached by all countries in the region about the use of the fresh water.
6. And most importantly, Jerusalem would be internationalized (meaning a UN force would monitor its gates and forbid the use of force inside the city borders). Jerusalem is to be frozen in its current state (with repairs allowed).

This person would challenge Israelites and Christians to a debate about religion to resolve the fundamental differences. The Jews would accept his challenge and ask him to find the Ark of the Covenant, *Al Tabut* (the coffin), claiming that if he did, they will admit they were wrong – that Jesus was the Messiah and *Mohammed* was a Prophet.

The Ark is significant for two reasons: it emits a sound that gives anyone hearing it peace and tranquility; and it gives victory to whichever believing army that carries it in battle. A third reason could possibly be that the Ark may contain the original Torah and belongings of Moses and Aaron. The Torah may show the truth about some of the ideological differences between Muslims and Jews. In any case, this challenge will be publicized internationally, and the Ark will be found.

How will someone who is not a prophet (directly inspired by God) find the Ark and other truths? The answer is through visions. Prophet *Mohammed* taught us that towards the End of Times, believers would have clearer visions. Their night dreams will be visions of things to happen. This is because belief will be confirmed through scientific

discoveries. Events foretold by the prophets will happen in abundance. People will be perfectly comfortable with their faith.

The current location of the Ark is a mystery. According to Jeremiah, he removed the Ark from the temple before Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonians to destroy the temple in 586 BC. Solomon had built the first temple around 966 BC. Jeremiah is said to have placed it in an unknown cave. However, this story has not been authenticated nor verified. Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple in 516 BC. This was a much humbler temple than that of Solomon. Herod restored the temple in 10 BC, almost past the glory of the Solomon temple. Work continued until about 62 or 64 AD.

There is doubt whether the Ark made it back to the temple of Zerubbabel or Herod. If it did make it back, one can speculate that when the Romans destroyed the second temple around the year 70 AD, they heard of the Ark and possibly found it. Some Jews believe it could have been buried under the ruins of the temple. I personally believe this is the reason they are excavating under *Al-Aqsa* mosque in Jerusalem. However, imagine that a Roman army general, Titus, took two hundred boatloads of jewels and valuables from the temple before he destroyed it. Add to this the rumor he must have heard that this box gives victory to any believing army carrying it! He would have assuredly treated it as a top prize to show his emperor. If the Ark made it to Rome, it would have been handed down from emperor to emperor, until it got to Constantine, who would have placed it in what is now called the Vatican. However, given its nature and the fact a Roman general was around with instructions to kill and destroy, it is probably in the Vatican. There are speculations that the Ark is in Ethiopia. We knew of the Ethiopian Jews (the *Falashas*), who probably became Jews right from the time Sheba went to meet Solomon, who migrated to Israel from Ethiopia in the years 968-991. It is believed that for years they had processions carrying an Ark.

Once the Ark is found, it will not be questioned by most. It will emit the sound that gives anyone who hears it peace and tranquility. Also, the original tablets will contain and show absolute truths that most will accept as such. These sounds will be heard on international radio and TV. Almost the whole world will concede to the existence of God and that this is a miraculous device. Of course, scientists will take out

their calculators and analyze the sounds and give theories about how the Ark is just a resonant cavity amplifying white noise. Some people will refuse to listen to the sound, claiming it is magical and causes individuals to be brainwashed into following the Person.

Most Jews will concede that the Person has satisfied them, and they are convinced that Jesus, the son of Mary, was indeed the Messiah and *Mohammed* was a prophet. However, some Jews will be unreasonable and claim that the Person did not fully satisfy the challenge. The Ark is not exactly as was seen in the movies. Most of the world will rise against this small group (whom I think will be less than twenty-five thousand).

In the meantime, I predict the US president will be interested in changing the demographics around Damascus. Muslims and fundamentalist Christians believe Jesus Christ will return in the *Umayyad* mosque in Damascus, where his followers will be waiting for him, anticipating his return. The US president waged war against Iraq so his army is close enough to Syria and will be able to force demographic changes. Unfortunately for the Iraqis, they were never the targets, except that *Saddam* provided an excuse for the president to have his troops close to their final destination. The US president has waited for the right moment to attack Syria. The moment will come when the Syrian president and top generals are implicated in the killing of the ex-Lebanese Prime Minister *Rafiq AlHariri*, in 2005. Once this connection is established, the US will demand the Syrians submit their president to be tried for the murder. Naturally, the Syrians will not surrender their president, particularly since the US will demand that his top generals are surrendered as well. This request will be impossible to fulfill. There would be no one capable of surrendering the group.

The US has learnt an important lesson from its experience in Iraq; namely, not to send its ground troops into a country until the entire country surrenders. The US will bombard the Syrian capital, Damascus, avoiding damage to the *Umayyad* mosque where John the Baptist is buried and where Jesus is expected to land for the Second Coming. This would be similar to the Clinton administration's bombardment of Serbia during the Kosovo crisis in 1999. The continuous bombardment forced the Serbian President, the late Slobodan Milosevic, to accept NATO's terms (turning himself over to UN investigators to face war crimes and murder

charges). A similar bombardment of select targets in Syria would yield the same result, particularly if they result in the death of the Syrian president. It stands to reason the only way for such activity to succeed without ground troops is through the death of the president or that the people capture him and hand him to the US. It is most likely the US will go at it alone on Syria. As Syria surrenders, a US appointed governor would rule the country according to the wishes of the US. These wishes will include similar activities as in Iraq: establishing more direct control by the *Shiites*; marginalizing the *Sunnis*; relinquishing Syria's demands that Israel return the Golan Heights to Syria; signing an unconditional peace treaty with Israel; limiting the size of the Syrian army; eliminating any support for the Palestinian cause from Syria; and ending Syria's involvement in Lebanon.

Once Syria is controlled by the US, the aging president of Egypt, *Hosny Mubarak*, will finally die. The US, unwillingly, will approve of the general sentiment that Egypt should hold internationally monitored free elections to choose *Mubarak's* replacement. These elections will yield a surprise, whereby a Muslim fundamentalist will win the presidency.

This will not meet with the approval of the US. The US will demand this president step down, citing a list of inappropriate actions. This will lead to a confrontation. The Egyptian people would believe this is their chosen president and that it is totally inappropriate for the US to demand a change. Egypt will be subjected to sanctions by the US and eventually, a short military skirmish will take place.

A US attack against Egypt will polarize public opinion worldwide against the US president. Egypt has slowly gained the respect and admiration of the world over the brave moves by President *Sadat*, whereby he visited Israel and established peace that Egypt respected in the face of many violations by Israel. Whereas, the world may have disagreed with US policies in Iraq and Syria, the two countries had been ruled by dictators that have directly or indirectly participated in the killing of thousands of innocent civilians of their own country. No one in the world would miss either leader. However, Egypt is a different case. The leader at the time would have been elected through free elections for the

first time in Egyptian history; this fact, combined with Egypt's growing popularity, will isolate the US president.

The predictions about economic sanctions against Iraq, Syria, and Egypt were contained in the following *hadeeth* from Prophet Mohammed, (*Sahih* Muslim: Book 41, Number 6961): *Abu Nadra* reported: We were in the company of *Jabir b. 'Abdullah* when he said it may happen that the people of Iraq may not send their *qafiz* and *dirhams* (their measures of food stuff and their money). We said, "Who would be responsible for it?" He said, "The non-Arabs would prevent them." He again said, "There is the possibility that the people of Syria may not send their *dinar* and *mudd*." We said, "Who would be responsible for it?" He said, "This prevention would be made by the Romans." He (*Jabir b. Abdullah*) kept quiet for a while and then reported *Allah's* Messenger, may peace be upon him, said, "There would be a caliph in the last (period) of my *Ummah* who would freely give handfuls of wealth to the people without counting it." I said to *Abu Nadra* and *Abu al-'Ala*, "Do you mean 'Umar bin 'Abd al-Aziz (an early Muslim Umayyad Caliph in Damascus)?" They said, "No (he would be *Imam Mahdi*)."

This *hadeeth* is very interesting. It states that non-Arabs will subject Iraq to sanctions; whereby they will not export any food or money. The non-Arab part is intriguing. When the sanctions against Iraq were imposed in 1991, out of the fifteen Security Council nations, Yemen, the only Arab country on the Council then, voted against the sanctions. Then the Prophet talked about sanctions against Syria. A *dirham*, a silver coin, is like a dime and a *dinar*, a gold coin, is like a dollar. Hence, the sanctions against Syria will be to a lesser extent than those against Iraq. The Prophet blamed the Syrian sanctions on the Romans (Europeans: the white race – US, United Kingdom, Australia, and maybe others will join them). The Prophet finally consoled the Muslims, stating these sanctions are indications of the end of the Dark Age. The caliph that will not count money but give it by handfuls or measures will appear after the sanctions. The measures used for Iraq were smaller than those used for Syria. A *dinar* is twelve *dirhams*. The *mudd* is much more than a *qifaz*. This clearly suggests that Syria's problem will be much less severe than Iraq's.

Another *hadeeth* is number 6923 in book 41 of *Sahih* Muslim, where *Abu Huraira* reported that *Allah's* Messenger (may peace be upon

him) said, “Iraq would withhold its *dirhams* and *qafiz*; Syria would withhold its *mudd* and *dinar* and Egypt would withhold its *irdab* and *dinar* and you would recoil to that position from where you started and you would recoil to that position from where you started and you would recoil to that position from where you started.”

It is important to note from this *hadeeth* that Egypt is added to the list. The measure for the sanctions against Egypt is half a sack of wheat compared to enough wheat for a single loaf of bread in the case of Iraq. Muslims are given the glad tiding that an attack or sanctions against Egypt would be the sign for the reversal in fortunes. All along, this Person would have been predicting the US president will be punished for his actions against innocent people around the world in the name of the war on terror. He will bluntly mention by name that the president and many of his entourage will either be jailed or die horrible deaths if they do not mend their ways. This will earn the Person the wrath of the US president, who will order him jailed in a US prison. Prison guards will be so convinced by the words of this Person that they will carry daily messages from him. This will further irritate the US president and things will escalate, and eventually, the US president will give a two-week notice that he will annihilate *Mecca* and *Medina*, and all residents must evacuate immediately.

The Person will then issue a statement to the US president stating that before he does that, he should check the polls and let them aid him. Anybody who believes in what he was preaching about peace and non-violence and the rule of morality should not go to work the following Wednesday. This becomes a world show of support, and seventy percent of workers around the globe do not work that day. This could include characters such as the Secretary of State. The US president calls him and asks if he was sick and if that is why he did not work. The Secretary of State will respond that he, too, is convinced with what the Person had preached. This will totally anger the US president. He will decide to accelerate his plan for destruction. The US president receives a warning from his top officials that he should use caution because some of the top programmers in the Pentagon did not show up for work on the Wednesday. Nobody is sure if there is full control over missiles. Some communications with the nuclear submarines have been disrupted. They agree a test missile

will be attempted. The missile does not fire. This becomes public information and the Person issues a statement. If someone does have control, they should fire a missile without a warhead. A missile is fired.

This total change from government control to individual control forces the US president to immediately release the Person from prison and step down from office. The world quickly agrees to give this person a six-month term as the president of the UN to try to implement some solutions to the world problems. The US president and his top aides are jailed for a short while; one of the first acts within the six months is to release all political detainees around the world, including this group. The Person succeeds phenomenally, and we now have a true caliph, viceroy. One of the biggest decisions during the six months period will be the annihilation of all weapons of mass destruction throughout the world, including conventional bombs over a certain destruction capacity. No fighter jets will have bombs (only air-to-air combat to protect against air strikes).

We would have an ill peace of seven years. It is ill because the US president and his aides will be traveling the globe to make alliances to breach this peace. After seven years, they will kill (on a yacht by one his mates with a machine gun and his body will not be found) this Person and show up in eighty units, each twelve thousand strong with as many heavy weapons as they can muster. They will catch the world by surprise and win dramatic victories. They will capture Jerusalem very quickly. The victors will give a speech in Jerusalem, declaring they now run the world, the capital is Jerusalem, and the Muslims do not worship any God. Upon saying this, a Muslim man will kill the speaker. Armageddon will begin. Millions will amass to the east, and millions will join the victors. A one million strong army will be dispatched to capture *Mecca* and *Medina*. An army will be assembled in Central Asia (Afghanistan and other places). The armies will fight bitter fights. Millions will be killed. The army heading to *Mecca* will be buried by a sandstorm. *AlMahdi* will head the believers' army. The believers will win. Just as they win, the Anti-Christ (*AdDajjal*) will appear.

AlMahdi

There are some narrations from Prophet *Mohammed* that suggest a special Muslim leader, *AlMahdi*, The Guided One, at the End of Times will recover the Ark from the hills near *Sham*, Damascus, around Lake Tiberias or Antioch. These narrations suggest *AlMahdi* will recover the Ark together with the original tablets of the Torah that will confirm Muslim beliefs. Interestingly, the only known narration that explains why *AlMahdi* is called so, The Guided One, is because he will be guided without prophethood to find the Ark and the associated books. *Mohammed* gave many descriptions of *AlMahdi*. We know his name will be like that of the Prophet, *Mohammed*, and their fathers would have the same name, *Abdullah*. *AlMahdi*, who will have a bright forehead (indicating not much hair), a long nose, and a dense beard, will be a descendant from the Prophet through his grandson, *Al Hassan*, from his daughter, *Fatima*. *AlMahdi* will be given *bay-aa* (allegiance) by the Holy Mosque in *Mecca* by at least four people, each of which is the son of a caliph. This suggests there will be a few caliphs immediately before him. An army will be dispatched from Syria to end his reign. This army will be buried under the sand as if swallowed by quicksand. He will rule a minimum of five years to a maximum of nine years. He will assemble an army to fight the Anti-Christ. This army will come from *Khorasan*, Afghanistan, wielding black flags. All believers should join this army if it is ever assembled. He will be holding the afternoon prayer, *Asr*, one day in Syria, for an army of believers besieging the Anti-Christ, when Jesus Christ will return on a white cloud. He will try to let Jesus lead when Jesus will tell him, "The prayers were called with you as a leader, lead!"

When we talk about *AlMahdi*, we have to stress that *Sunnis* and *Shiites* differ in their expectations about his nature. The *Shiites* believe he was born over twelve hundred years ago and that he disappeared in a cave or the like and will reappear at the End of Times. *Sunnis* do not

believe in such mysterious disappearances and appearances. *Sunnis* believe *AlMahdi* is a normal man who will lead believers against various groups, including the Anti-Christ. The Euphrates will almost reveal a large treasure of gold. The “almost” part of this statement could be interpreted as oil, or as some Arabs say, “black gold.” The Prophet warned about this mountain of gold. People and nations will fight over it. He said it is best to stay away from this gold and not fight for it. Just before *AlMahdi* appears, an unjust Syrian leader, *AlSufyani*, will lead a Syrian army into a few victories. *AlMahdi* will first appear between the ages of thirty and forty and lead an army that will battle against a Syrian army led by *AlSufyani*. *AlMahdi*’s group will win. This will cause people to recognize his potential for leadership. *AlMahdi* will then settle in *Medina*, where *AlSufyani* will send an army to capture him. *AlMahdi* will flee to *Mecca*. That is when people will swear their allegiance to him. *AlSufyani*’s army will go back and tell him, “*AlMahdi* appeared, and if you do not give him your allegiance, we will kill you.” He will comply. *AlMahdi* will move to Jerusalem, where Muslims will send him their alms and charities, and he will build a great wealth. In fact, his wealth will be so great that it would not run out, even though he would give everyone who asks him, all they ask. It is said he will not count money; rather, he will measure it. Almost the whole world will accept his leadership.

It is possible there is more than one guided leader in the history and future of the Muslim people. Many, including an *Abbasid* leader who fought the *Umayyad* Caliph and established the *Abbasid* Caliphate, had used the name. A recent leader in Sudan used the title.

The Anti-Christ (*Ad-Dajjal*)

On the number of Caliphs, viceroys, that will reign before the Day of Judgment, we know of *AlMahdi* and potentially the four others. However, Prophet *Mohammed* had said there would be twelve Caliphs whom all Muslims will follow. We can count the four immediately succeeding the Prophet (*Abu Bakr*, *Omar*, *Othman*, and *Aly*); for some time, all Muslims accepted the rule *Mo'away*; *Omar bin AbdulAziz* is unanimously considered one of the twelve. This would make for five or six Caliphs that have already ruled with six or seven remaining. I believe that even though there may be so many, they will not rule for long periods. I think that they may be assassinated given the strong anti-peace undercurrents that one would expect to follow any world peace.

The Anti-Christ is a different human being; different in the sense that he seems to be mentioned by many prophets, but his background and works are somewhat of a mystery. Prophet *Mohammed* warned Muslims a lot about the Anti-Christ, *Al-Massih Ad-Dajjal*, or the false Messiah. There are several narrations about *Ad-Dajjal* in the *Sunnah* of Prophet *Mohammed*. In a group of narrations, *Mohammed* (peace be upon him) described *Ad-Dajjal* as a man with green eyes, the right eye is blind, and the skin of the eyebrow hangs down over the blind eye. On his forehead, every believer will be able to read the word disbeliever. This is a common confusion about the Mark of the Beast or Satan (666). Often people think the Mark is a number. In reality, the mark is a word: disbeliever. The Jews used to associate numbers with letters. Six hundred and sixty-six is the numerical value of the Hebrew word for word disbeliever. *Ad-Dajjal*'s parents will not have children for thirty years of marriage.

The Prophet suggested a particular man, *Ibn IsSayyad*, living at the time, fit the description and was possibly the Anti-Christ. The Prophet asked him whether he was *Ad-Dajjal*. He replied, "I would not mind being he. I know where he was born, and I know all about him." This

man went to pilgrimage later on and fought battles for the Muslims army. He finally disappeared during a very hot period, where many people died of the heat. There are several occasions where the Prophet, with some of his most trusted companions went to check on *Ibn IsSayyad*. In one encounter, the Prophet challenged him to tell what was on the Prophet's mind. The Prophet said later that he had smoke on his mind. The Prophet stopped the man when he said, "Smoke!" In a different narration, we learn of a group of people who went on a sea trip, and their ship capsized.

They ended up on a strange island protected by a beast they did not recognize. The beast told them to go and talk to a man in a cave who was waiting for them. The man was chained and asked them whence they came. They told him, "*Hijaz*." He asked them, "Did the Prophet of the End of Times appear?" They said, "Yes." He asked, "Did Arabia follow him?" They replied, "Not all." He said, "It would be better for them if they did." He then explained he is the Anti-Christ and had been chained there for a long time, waiting for the right time to break the chains and escape. The men made a raft and came back to tell the story.

We learn from these narrations that the Prophet was not inspired as to exactly who the Anti-Christ is but was given a clear description of him. The description fits *Ibn IsSayyad*. We also understand the Anti-Christ is not a normal man in that he may have lived for thousands of years.

Ad-Dajjal will appear in *Kharasan* in Afghanistan and will be followed initially by people whose faces look like an anvil. *Ad-Dajjal* will have with him the like of heaven and hell. They will not be as they appear. He will make people choose between them. People should choose his hell, for in reality, it is heaven. When a town follows him, he will order the sky to rain beneficial rain; he will order the land to blossom; and he will order the land to get its treasures out. The land will then reveal what gold and other precious minerals it has and they will follow him like a swarm of bees. He will know when he meets a believer and he will tell his followers, "I will kill this guy; then I will resurrect him; he will still deny me." He will then tell the guy, "Do you believe I am God?" The guy will reply, "No." He will tell him, "I will cut you into two halves if you do not believe in me." The guy will tell him, "Do

whatever you want.” *Ad-Dajjal* will then cut him with a sword. The guy will die. *Ad-Dajjal* would order the two halves together and the guy will live again. *Ad-Dajjal* will ask him, “Do you believe in me now?” He will reply, “I was never more certain than now that you are a liar.” *Ad-Dajjal*’s followers will believe stronger because of such instances.

There will be six years between the opening of a great city and the appearance of *Ad-Dajjal*.

The Anti-Christ will be able to meet any challenge posed to him. It is said that some people will challenge him to raise their dead parents to confirm that he is God. He will do exactly that. To make things more complicated, the challenger’s real parents will be temporarily resurrected for him/her and will verify through questions that they are the real parents.

Believers are instructed to stay away from the Anti-Christ. One may be tempted to try to kill him to rid the world of him. However, no one but Jesus Christ can kill him. *Ad-Dajjal* will claim he is God. God will humor him with special godly powers. Most Christians have great difficulties accepting that Jesus of the End of Times will be wielding a sword or killing anybody. The fact of the matter is that even the Holy Bible describes it exactly the same way. In John’s book of Revelations, chapters 19 and 20, after many chapters talk about beasts with ten horns coming out of the sea, we get a clear description about how Jesus will return to slay the beast and rule for the Millennium Kingdom. Muslims do not believe it is a thousand-year kingdom. However, this detail is not important. Many Christians believe we are already in that thousand-year period, interpreting it as the rule of church. Given Muslim prophecies, Jesus will return and rule.

Imagine that over the next forty years or so, Jesus Christ of the Christian faith re-emerges: a blue-eyed man with long wavy hair, who says he is either God or God’s Son: a man who can raise the dead, heal the sick and ailing, create a bird from mud, and tell people their secrets. It stands to reason that most Christians will believe he is who he says he is and immediately follow him. Many Muslims will follow him and abandon their faith that Jesus was a mortal and had no physical relationship to God. Hindus will accept he is the true reincarnation of a God and follow him. Buddhists will accept he is a Grand Master and follow. The Anti-Christ will bring apparent blessings to his followers

and misery to his deserters. Villages, towns, cities, and countries that follow him will have rain and other blessings, while his deserters will have to flee to mountains to survive. What saves us from the Anti-Christ? The only saving is an unwavering belief that God does not walk the earth.

I would like to remind that the war against the Anti-Christ is not necessarily a war between Muslims and non-Muslims as most Muslims would contend and many fundamentalist Christians would advocate. It is rather a war between believers and disbelievers. Some Muslims demand that *Islam* is a prerequisite for belief. I guess it depends on how one defines *Islam*.

The Egyptian

by Orla Aaquist

2005 Version

I sailed along the Nile searching for my soul
The days were warm and clear, but my body cold
From Aswan to Cairo I came, searching for a man with the name
Of *Mohammed*, where did you go when you slipped into these tombs
Mohammed where are you hiding in all these empty ruins
Descending never ending stony stairs, I looked for him but he just
wasn't there.
Mohammed I am here to understand.
I only wait for you to lend me a hand.
Give me the sign I've been searching for so long.

He came out of a pyramid, he was only five foot two,
His hair was tightly curled upon his head, his beard midnight blue,
He carried in his hand a paper old and worn, that he clutched tight
to keep his fingers warm.
Like a primate with his hand inside a jar in which he's got a hold
A ball he wants to play with but his fingers won't unfold.
I stood there a while to look at him
And suddenly he began to sing, he sang
“*Mohammed* I am here to understand
But how can I find the truth with just one hand?
Give me the sign I've been waiting for so long.”
Then he handed me the parchment, then he was gone,
Where did you go? *Mohammed* where did you go?

I stood there with the manuscript, I held it in my hand.
I could not release it, I did not understand.
Descending, never ending stony stairs, I called for him but he just
wasn't there.
Mohammed where are you hiding...

Dr. Hatim Zaghloul

*Chairman, Wi-LAN Inc.
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer,
Innovative Products for Life Inc.
Chairman, Muslim Council of Calgary*



Dr. Zaghloul co-founded Wi-LAN, Cell-Loc, NTG Clarity, QCC, and Wireless Inc., four companies that listed their stock on the stock market rose where investors had a chance to realize profits in excess of fifty times their initial investment. Dr. Zaghloul has received many awards: One of ten Great Canadians by MacLean's Magazine in July 2000; one of two Calgarians of the Year 2000 by Business in Calgary magazine; Entrepreneur of the Year finalist for two consecutive years; first Wireless Hall of Fame inductee; 2000 Pinnacle Award by Fraser Milner law firm. Dr. Zaghloul led Wi-LAN to receiving many awards for its technology and its performance.

Dr. Zaghloul has been very active in the Calgary community both at the Muslim level and the general population level. He was the main sponsor for an exhibition on the tomb of Tutankhamen in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary; he has served in the Muslim community at various levels: he helped co-found a Muslim monthly magazine for Calgary; he was one of the founders of the Muslim Community Foundation of Calgary that eventually built the first Muslim school in Calgary in 2000 and acquired a 94,000 square foot facility in 2005; he served as President of the Muslim Association of Calgary in 1993 and as Chairman of the Muslim Council of Calgary since 2003. Dr. Zaghloul works towards maintaining the unity of Muslims in Calgary and towards a better understanding of *Islam* and Muslims by Canadians. Dr. Zaghloul was the Western Zonal representative for the *Islamic Society of North America* which manages over two thirds of North American mosques.

Hatim is married and has lots of children.